A History of Jewish Life in the Central Appalachian Coalfields, 1870s to 1970s

Deborah R. Weiner

Dissertation Submitted to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
History

Ronald L. Lewis, Ph.D., Chair
Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Ph.D.
Ken Fones-Wolf, Ph.D.
Robert Blobaum, Ph.D.
Lee Shai Weissbach, Ph.D.

Department of History

Morgantown, West Virginia
2002

Keywords: Jews, Jewish community, Jewish-gentile relations, Jewish identity, West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia, coal economy

ABSTRACT

A History of Jewish Life in the Central Appalachian Coalfields, 1870s to 1970s

Deborah R. Weiner

This study explores the intersection of two historical phenomena. From the 1880s to the 1920s, Central Appalachia experienced rapid industrial development as the entry of railroads into the mountains initiated large-scale coal extraction. At the same time, East European Jewish immigrants streamed into America's eastern seaboard. Some found their way to the coalfields, where they carved out a role as retailers in an expanding rural-industrial economy. This niche enabled them to build several small but vital Jewish communities which lasted late into the twentieth century. Their economic position facilitated the entry of Jews into the coalfield middle class and made them contributors to the region's transformation from an agrarian, subsistence-oriented society to a consumer-oriented society.

Focusing on southern West Virginia, southeastern Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia, the study examines how the Jews' East European background interacted with the Appalachian environment to shape their experience. Jews were welcomed into a society where the small preexisting local elite needed entrepreneurial newcomers to help achieve economic development. They participated fully in their towns' social and civic life and created a strong communal life, establishing nine congregations. Yet they confronted numerous dilemmas related to their anomalous position: as non-Christians in an overwhelmingly Christian milieu; middle-class town dwellers amidst a predominantly working-class rural population; non-participants in the single industry that employed almost everyone else; bystanders in a region often wracked by violent labor-management conflict. The study examines the challenges Jews faced in the economic, social, and communal realms. It devotes particular attention to how they dealt with the boom-and-bust nature of the coal economy and the domination of coal company stores. It delves deeply into how they maintained Jewish community and identity in a location seemingly remote from American Jewish centers.

The study is informed by literature on "middleman minorities," the transition to capitalism in western societies, and the "frontier" as historical construct. Above all, it draws on the themes of Appalachian studies and American Jewish studies, and aims to contribute to both fields. It helps fills a gap in Appalachian studies: recent scholarship emphasizes the region's ethnic diversity and the complexities of its economic transformation, yet the role of commerce has been neglected and few studies of its ethnic communities exist. American Jewish history focuses on major metropolitan areas. A study of small-town, rural Jews contributes to a more complete picture of the American Jewish experience and offers a unique perspective on issues of identity, assimilation, and Jewish-gentile relations.

Acknowledgments

Not until I actually sat down to write this did I realize how many people and institutions I have to thank for helping me through the process of writing my dissertation. My first thanks go to my advisor, Ron Lewis, who has a special knack for benignly suggesting dissertation topics and then benignly looking on as his advisees go through the whole torturous process, ready to give his advice and encouragement whenever needed. The other members of my committee were equally encouraging. Liz Fones-Wolf, true friend as well as mentor, provided moral support and the occasional philosophical discussion. Bob Blobaum helped me grasp the complexities of East European history and geography. Both he and Ken Fones-Wolf offered perceptive comments on the manuscript. Special thanks to Lee Shai Weissbach, participating from Louisville, whose expertise in American Jewish history and kind interest in my work were much appreciated.

Fellowships from the American Jewish Archives and the West Virginia Humanities Council enabled me to root around in congregational records and do field research. The Southern Jewish Historical Society provided a sort of institutional "home" of people who shared my interests and lent their enthusiastic support. I have benefited from discussions with Hollace Weiner, Sherry Zander, Wendy Besmann, and Len Rogoff, while *Southern Jewish History* editor Mark Bauman has been an especially valued mentor, dedicated to advancing scholarship in the field. Members of the Appalachian Studies Association also sustained me with their sincere interest in my discoveries on coalfield Jewish communities. Thanks to West Virginia University, which granted a Swiger fellowship; its Regional Research Institute, which gave me institutional support; and its History Department, which offered a congenial climate for scholarly work.

Family and friends never swayed from cheering me on, even as the years passed and they wondered what was taking so long. My parents and siblings, in addition to their unwavering support, read parts of the study and offered helpful comments. Thanks to Jean Butzen, who remained enthusiastic even from long distance, and my other Chicago friends. Thanks to West Virginia friends Maryanne Reed and Chrisse Jones, who gave me respite from my computer when I really needed it (and put up with a lot of grumpiness). And thanks to Paul Rakes, with whom graduate school has been truly a shared experience.

Above all I need to acknowledge a group of people whose input added immeasurably to this study. Without exception, the current or former coalfield residents I interviewed offered valuable insights, thoughtful comments, and great stories. They showed admirable patience in answering my questions and many extended their hospitality as well. There are several I'd like to especially mention. Manuel Pickus and Edward Eiland shared their own broad interest in the history of their communities. Along with lending his stories and insights, Mel Sturm and his brother Evan took me on a tour of Middlesboro and its Jewish cemetery. Tom Childress and Edna Drosick supplied their knowledge of Pocahontas history and a tour of the "Hebrew Mountain" cemetery in the pouring rain. Milton Koslow and Bertie Cohen were particularly thoughtful interviewees and most encouraging. Tom Pressman of Huntington put me in touch with members of the Bank and Totz families, while Gail Bank shared his genealogical research. Some of these people were also gracious enough to read and comment on my work. I can't really thank them enough, and I only hope that I did manage to capture something of their families' history.

A History of Jewish Life in the Central Appalachian Coalfields, 1870s to 1970s

Contents

Tables

Introduction

In 1900, the coal town of Keystone, in southern West Virginia, had just over a thousand inhabitants. More than 10 percent of them were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and their children. This fact might startle anyone familiar with Appalachian history, since there is very little in the literature to suggest that such a demographic makeup could have been possible. Meanwhile, most American Jews would be surprised to hear that not all the Jewish immigrants who poured into Ellis Island during the great migration of the 1880s to 1920s settled in large U.S. cities. Even people who are aware of the historical existence of small town Jewish communities tend to assume that those communities were composed of German Jews who arrived in this country in the mid-nineteenth century.[1]

This study of Jewish communities in the Central Appalachian coalfields, therefore, attempts to broaden our understanding of Appalachian diversity and add to the portrait of small town American Jewry. It should be stated from the outset that Keystone's demographics were not typical of the coalfields: Jews made up a much smaller portion of the population in other towns where they resided. Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, enough Jewish families settled in the region to form nine thriving congregations. Their populations ranged from a high of around seventy in the smallest Jewish community to more than two hundred in the largest. Jews constituted a significant segment of the small middle class in their towns, integrating to a high degree into the local social scene. Unlike other coalfield ethnic groups, they found employment not in the coal industry, but by carving out an economic niche as retailers. As merchants and as citizens, they contributed substantially to the development of their towns, and especially to downtown business districts.

The geographical parameters of the study include the area of southern West Virginia, southeastern Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia commonly known as the southern coalfields. Jews arrived at the dawn of the coal era: the first Jewish settler came to the New River boomtown of Sewell, West Virginia, in 1871, even before construction was completed on the railroad that would kick off the coal boom. As rail lines advanced through the torturous Central Appalachian mountains, coal development followed close behind and people from all over the world poured in to become part of a growing industrial workforce. Jewish entrepreneurs and their families settled in burgeoning towns throughout the region, eventually concentrating in the county seats, which emerged as the principal commercial centers. The study focuses on the places where they formed congregations: Pocahontas, Virginia; Middlesboro and Harlan, Kentucky; Keystone, Kimball, Welch, Williamson, Logan, and Beckley, West Virginia. It also looks at smaller towns with Jewish contingents, especially in Fayette and McDowell Counties in West Virginia, and the Cumberland Gap area of Kentucky and Virginia.[2]

Because the study aims to contribute to both Appalachian and American Jewish historiography, it is grounded in both sets of literature and particularly draws its context from studies of small town Jewry and studies of the southern coalfields. Although its protagonists are Jewish immigrants and their descendants, in many ways it is as much about Appalachia as it is about Jews. The coalfield environment influenced the economic activities of Jewish residents, shaped the interaction between Jews and non-Jews, and affected the course of Jewish communal life. In turn, though Jews remained a small minority occupying an economically marginal position outside of the coal industry, they made a mark on the region's development.

But what can the history of coalfield Jews add to the respective stories of American Jewry and Appalachia, aside from the fact that Jews did indeed live in this place? As it turns out, the

Jewish experience in the southern coalfields touches on many issues concerning the region's social and economic order. As retailers, Jewish entrepreneurs faced the daunting challenge of succeeding within the coal economy—an economy that initially offered tremendous opportunity because of the fast-growing population, but also posed impressive obstacles to small businesses. The most important obstacles were the boom-and-bust nature of the coal industry, upon which the overall economic health of the region depended, and the institution of the coal company store. By exploring how these forces affected Jewish economic life, the coal economy receives attention from a point of view rarely considered in the literature: the view of the independent merchant. An investigation into the position of Jews in the social order reveals how the region's population coped with the remarkable diversity of peoples brought together by the coal boom. Also, as members of the small coalfield middle class, Jews acted on their class interests in the civic and political arenas. An examination of their attitudes and actions illuminates the position of the middle class in the labor conflicts that embroiled the region.

In fact, by exploring the relationship of Jews to the surrounding society, the study sheds light more generally on the coalfield middle class. This in-between group has received little treatment in coalfield studies, and the towns where the middle class held sway have received far less notice than company towns and coal camps. When the middle class does appear in the literature, it is portrayed, rather uniformly, as a "local elite" that acted as cheerleader for the coal industry. This depiction is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete. In real life, members of the coalfield middle class—and the county seat towns and other independent towns they inhabited—played a more dynamic role in the region's social, cultural, and commercial affairs. True, most of the population consisted of industrial workers and their families, while the economic decisions governing the region's fate were made by the absentee corporate controllers of its land and

resources. Yet that reality does not necessarily reflect the day-to-day level where people lived out their lives, interacting with each other in neighborhoods, churches, schools, stores, and places of amusement as well as workplaces. Since coalfield Jewish communities were located solely in county seat towns and other independent towns, the study will investigate day-to-day life in these towns, the region's economic and social centers.[3]

While it is easy to make the case that an exploration of coalfield Jewish life offers a fresh perspective from which to view Appalachian history—after all, few studies of the region's non-native-white ethnic groups have been produced[4]—it is somewhat more difficult to establish what the subject might contribute to the literature on small American Jewish communities. Numerous works on such communities have been published dealing with every region of the country, though not specifically Appalachia. Their authors have established a basic pattern that the coalfield Jewish population did not depart from: these communities were merchant-based, usually starting with peddlers who gradually settled down to owning stores and raising families; they became fairly prosperous; they actively contributed to the civic life of their towns; they formed congregations that might have started out Orthodox (if the membership was of East European origin) but typically gravitated to Reform Judaism. Only on the matter of interaction with the surrounding society are there real disparities, with some studies reporting that Jews mixed easily with non-Jews and others suggesting that they remained socially segregated.[5]

As long ago as 1980, this uniformity led Howard Rabinowitz to question "whether or not scholars should be spending their time writing histories of individual Jewish communities. . . . After all, these studies simply fill in the details for an overall picture which already seems clear."[6] In large part, this study does provide one more variation on a theme. Yet within the familiar pattern there are plenty of gaps remaining to be filled in order to understand how these

communities actually functioned. For one thing, although works devoted specifically to Jewish women have explored their role in economic, social, and communal life, rarely have issues of gender been integrated into a community study. The following pages include that half of the Jewish population often left out of the peddler-to-merchant paradigm. Women made substantial contributions to the economic well-being of their families, while their efforts to sustain Jewish identity and community in the domestic and communal realms were too critical to be ignored.

Moreover, the study takes to heart Rabinowitz's protest against the upbeat tone of most community studies. "Surely," he stated, "there is more to [the American Jewish] experience than smooth assimilation, rapid economic progress, and noble behavior toward ourselves and others."[7] Coalfield Jews did achieve economic mobility and assimilated into the surrounding society while forming close-knit communities that helped them sustain their Jewish identity, but the process was far from smooth. The study chronicles a bumpy road to prosperity, acknowledging the people who fell by the wayside and showing that financial insecurity lurked just around the corner for even the most successful family businesses. It explores the conflict as well as the camaraderie that marked Jewish communities. It considers the complex motivations that led people to become involved in communal activity and discusses the challenges posed by the position of Jews as a very small minority in a region where Christianity was a dominating presence. Further, the study delves into the less "noble" aspects of Jewish life in the region. Like everyone else who gathered in the towns that sprang up when the coal industry moved in, Jews became caught up in the boomtown atmosphere and engaged in behavior that could not always be described as kosher. By detailing their less respectable activities, the study moves away from the sedate depictions typical of community studies and shows that Jews living in the American hinterland had more in common with their counterparts in the rough-and-tumble world of the

Lower East Side than has been generally recognized.

The boomtown environment not only gave scope to the more unrefined tendencies among the region's Jewish (and other) inhabitants. It actually helped shape economic activities, Jewish-gentile relations, and even Jewish communal development. In fact, the concept of the boomtown turned out to be somewhat of an organizing principle for the study, connecting themes of American Jewish history and Appalachian history while also allowing for both to be considered within an international context. In the instant towns created by the coal boom, outsiders quickly overwhelmed the small local population, and thus a new social landscape formed that allowed for relatively fluid social dynamics. Although the pre-existing local elite remained a powerful force in this new society, they needed to seek allies among the newcomers, so Jewish entrepreneurs found a greater welcome than they otherwise might have. The Jewish experience points to similarities between coalfield towns and boomtowns in other places around the world, where Jews found a comparable place in the social order. The freewheeling atmosphere that prevailed throughout the coalfields—but found its purest expression in non-county seats such as Keystone, Pocahontas, and Middlesboro—changed over time, as the towns became more settled. But their boomtown origins continued to influence social interaction.[8]

The boomtown concept not only provides a comparative framework within which to consider the history of a particular Jewish group, it also offers a way to step back from the somewhat limiting view of Central Appalachia as a geographic entity to look at the region's place in the world. The boomtowns in various countries that welcomed Jews were located on peripheries, areas that were just beginning to be incorporated into the capitalist world system. So it was with Appalachia, whose coal was destined to fuel industrialization in distant lands. Resource exploitation led to the region's abrupt integration into the world market—a process that

had begun over a century earlier, but had stalled, awaiting the transportation networks necessary for full incorporation. This final transition to industrial capitalism was marked by social and economic upheaval that proved devastating to the agrarian-oriented people who lived in the mountains before the coal industry came. Ironically, many of the newcomers who arrived to participate in the new order, including Jews, were fleeing the same kind of transformation, then underway in Southern and Eastern Europe, that had eroded the place they had held in the pre-capitalist economy. The Jews who forged a commercial niche in the coal economy were fulfilling a role they had filled in Eastern Europe, but could no longer maintain.[9]

In pursuing these various themes, the study first traces the old country background of coalfield Jews and describes how they found their way to the region. Ensuing chapters discuss their economic niche, their place in the social order, relations with non-Jews, and the evolution of coalfield Jewish communities. Major points of discussion are as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter reviews the East European history of Jewish immigrants who settled in the coalfields, with special attention to how Jews came to play the role of "middleman" in the East European economy—and how that role deteriorated in the nineteenth century. To ground future coalfield residents in their old country milieu, the chapter traces as closely as possible their specific origins in the towns and regions of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. It also encapsulates the preindustrial history of the Central Appalachian plateau and the events leading up to the coal boom. Ensuing chapters build on issues delineated here to show how the Jews' East European past—their experiences, networks, and cultural legacy—combined with coalfield conditions to shape their experience in their new home.

Chapter 2: This chapter discusses the forces that brought Jewish immigrants to the region

and shows how they developed their economic niche as "middlemen." It stresses the role of Jewish networks in directing immigrants to specific areas within the coalfields and in enabling them to take advantage of the entrepreneurial opportunities created by the coal boom.

Chapter 3: This chapter explores the Jewish retail niche and examines how Jewish merchants interacted with the single industry economy. Like everyone else, Jews were dependent on the coal industry for survival. The industry's volatility made for an insecure economic existence; downturns in the coal business could drive shopkeepers into bankruptcy. Meanwhile, company stores stunted the development of the retail sector. While some coal companies were determined to drive out independent merchants, others were prepared to coexist with them. But either way, company stores had built-in advantages that independent storeowners found difficult to overcome. Within these restrictions, Jewish merchants managed to succeed by drawing on internal group resources. These resources also helped them bring the products of an emerging American consumer culture to the coalfields. Thus, as retailers, they contributed to the region's transition from an agrarian, subsistence-oriented society to a consumer-oriented society.

Chapter 4: The first of two chapters to deal with the relationship of Jews to the surrounding social environment places the Jewish population within the social order of the coalfields. Jews entered fully into the life of the region, from the seamier affairs of the boomtowns to the middle class activities of the county seats. Their economic niche enabled them to become mainstays of the small middle class in the towns where they resided. Generally, they were well integrated into coalfield society, but several factors produced variations from place to place. In addition to the "boomtown atmosphere," such factors included the size of the town, percentage of Jews in the population, and the amount of ethnic diversity. To different degrees, Jews felt undercurrents of non-acceptance but experienced little overt anti-semitism.

Chapter 5: This chapter on Jewish communal activity asserts that despite their eagerness to participate in coalfield society, Jews were determined to maintain their religious and cultural identity, and to pass their heritage on to the next generation. Their concern with creating a Jewish environment for themselves and their children enabled them to overcome internal differences to create close-knit congregations. Their communal organizations offered not only a place to practice their religion and experience Jewish culture, but also served as a vehicle for resolving tensions between assimilation and the desire to maintain a separate identity. The surrounding milieu influenced the development of their congregations, with distinct differences between boomtowns and county seats.

Chapter 6: The second chapter on Jews and the broader social scene places Jewish-gentile relations in the larger context of race, class, religion, and politics. Jews were one of many coalfield ethnic groups attempting to adapt to a new environment, yet each group faced different challenges. The chapter explores the stereotypes about Jews that existed in the region, the subtle and underlying tensions that affected Jewish-gentile relations, and the most overt source of unease for Jews: the pervasive climate of Christianity. It also explores their relations with other minorities, particularly African Americans. But in addition to being a minority, Jews were also solid members of the middle class in a region often polarized along class lines. Contrary to most depictions of the coalfield middle class, they attempted to remain neutral during labor conflicts, largely because their businesses depended on the good will of all segments of the population. The chapter describes the wide range of reactions Jews exhibited to their minority status, to the attitudes that gentiles displayed toward them, and to the conflicts that did not directly involve them yet deeply affected their lives. On the whole, they existed as both “insiders” and “outsiders” in coalfield society.

The vibrant Jewish communities that thrived in the coalfields from roughly the 1890s to the 1970s have largely disappeared, victimized by the drastic economic decline that hit the region starting in the mid-1950s. Only two of the nine congregations still exist (in Williamson and Beckley), both in much reduced form. From today's standpoint, it is hard to believe that thousands of Jews lived in the coalfields during that eighty-year time span, that Jewish life once flourished. Because of present reality, it is easy to look on their story as an oddity of history. It does not, somehow, seem possible that Jews really belonged in this place.

But they did. Jews were, in fact, not out of place in the coalfields, but were an integral part of the social and economic development of the region, along with the many other ethnic groups brought by the coal boom. Their presence was the natural outcome of social and economic forces emanating from both within and outside the region, combined with the decisions of individuals who were parts of families and networks that influenced their choices. The study includes stories and anecdotes about some of these individuals, in order to provide a sense of the coming together of personal choice and larger societal forces. These stories start in Eastern Europe and continue through the journey to the coalfields to the establishment of families and communities and careers in the region. And as the stories show, in addition to belonging in Central Appalachia, coalfield Jews also belonged firmly within the pattern of small town American Jewish life. Although they chose to settle in a seemingly unlikely place, they remained connected to their roots. They were both Appalachian and Jewish.

Notes to Introduction

---

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census Schedule, McDowell County, W.Va., 1900; Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262.

[2] Ron Lane and Ted Schempf, *Sewell: A New River Community* (Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1985). The study does not include the regional center of Bluefield, West Virginia, which was located just outside the coalfields. Bluefield's Jewish community, the largest in southern West Virginia, will be referred to in the study in relation to coalfield Jewish communities.

[3] In the Appalachian studies literature, the terms "local elite" and "middle class" are not always strictly defined and are often used interchangeably. In *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Altina Waller posits three classes in the industrializing Central Appalachian plateau: absentee owners, a "small, emerging middle class, which we have been calling the local elite," and the majority, defined as small farmers and laborers in the coal and timber industries (203-204).

In this study, the term "middle class" is defined slightly differently: it refers to people who were not industrial or agricultural workers, on the one hand, nor the local representatives of the economic powers who owned the region's land and resources, on the other. This in-between group may have been small in number, but encompassed a diverse range: from lower-level white collar workers to prosperous downtown business owners, residential and commercial real estate developers, and professionals. This definition is partly one of expediency, since it allows virtually the entire Jewish population to be included. It also, arguably, reflects the social reality of the coalfields, since white collar townspeople tended to socialize with each other regardless of income level and did not have much social interaction with either the miners in the coal camps or the region's uppermost elite (for example, the coal operators of the "millionaire town" of Bramwell, West Virginia). Moreover, a single individual might move from store clerk to department store owner—and then back down to store clerk, if conditions proved unfavorable—without necessarily changing his or her class status. However, it is also true that the wealthier portion of this broad middle class (which perhaps could be seen as the "upper middle class") were in a position to join with local landowners, bankers, and coal industry representatives to form a more exclusive "local elite" that played a disproportionate role in shaping town development and local politics.

Studies that do consider the Central Appalachian middle class include Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mary Beth Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 270-296.

[4] The only full-length treatment of a non-native-white group in the southern coalfields is Joe William Trotter, Jr.'s *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

[5] Most studies of small Jewish populations focus on small cities, rather than small towns such as those in the coalfields. Exceptions include Robert E. Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York: Ktav, 1978); Norton B. Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 15 (October, 1982): 48-78; and Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988). The first major treatment of a small Jewish community using the methods of the new social history was Steven Hertzberg's *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978). Other important studies include Ewa Morawska's *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Eli Evans's memoir *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997 [1973]) continues to serve as a valuable introduction for anyone interested in southern Jewish history.

No scholarly studies address Jews in Appalachia. Morawska's work, although concerned with Johnstown, Pennsylvania, does not use an Appalachian context. A local history that does provide more of a sense of the region is Wendy Besmann's *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), although her frame of reference is really the South and not Appalachia. On the topic of local histories, mention must be made of Abraham I Shinedling's massive three-volume work, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963). (The massiveness resulted from the inclusion of numerous lists of people involved in Jewish organizations, as well as Shinedling's eccentric practice of providing at least a paragraph on every single town in the state, even if the town lacked a Jewish population—which he would note by observing that "no Jews ever lived in this town.") Despite its flaws, it provided a wealth of detail and served as a launching point for further research.

[6] Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Writing Jewish Community History," *American Jewish History* 70 (September 1980): 119-127 (quote, 126).

[7] Rabinowitz, "Writing Jewish Community History," 127.

[8] On Jews and boomtowns, see especially Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Moses Rischin and John Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

[9] This aspect of the study draws on works of Appalachian, rural, and Jewish history that focus on the transition to capitalism, often from the perspective of world systems theory. See for example, Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*; Wilma Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in an Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1985; Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, eds., *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism: Poland and its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Walter P. Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); Gilman and Shain, eds., *Jewries on the Frontier*.

Chapter 1

From Shtetl to Coalfield: The Migration of East European Jews to Appalachia

In 1888 Sam and Herman Weinstein left their hometown of Raseiniai in central Lithuania. Although their father, "a mill man," had been "well-to-do for that country," economic conditions in the region had caused their situation to deteriorate greatly and the brothers became early participants in the massive wave of Russian Jewish immigration to America that occurred between 1880 and 1924. They landed in New York City "penniless" and found work in a shirt factory where they earned $3.50 per week. Unable to support their mother and sister, who had also emigrated, they determined to seek new opportunities.[1]

Sana Moscovitch Pickus joined the immigration movement at the other end of its time span. She arrived in Baltimore in 1921, accompanied by her newlywed daughter and son-in-law, to unite with her three sons already established in America. Her husband Mendel had died in 1909 "in his birthplace, the 'ancestral' home of the Pickus family, i.e. in the town of Uzda, province of Minsk, Russia." The Pickuses had been grain dealers, an occupation hard hit by changes in the Russian Empire's economy at the turn of the century. A pious woman, Sana Pickus brought with her two prayer books with Yiddish commentary and a two-volume set of the venerable *Tsenah Urenah*, a Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible designed for the common folk, particularly women (who, according to Jewish custom, did not learn to read Hebrew).[2]

The immigration sagas of the Weinsteins and Pickuses adhere closely to the first half of the archetypal success story of East European Jewish migration to America enshrined in family narratives and history books: shtetl origins and old country tribulations, early poverty in the new land, hard work and determination, family cohesion, the piety of the elders. The second half of

the story departs from the conventional narrative, which usually unfolds entirely within the confines of America's major metropolitan areas, from gritty ethnic neighborhood to middle-class suburb. Instead, the Weinsteins' search for economic advancement led them to the coalfields of southeastern Kentucky, where they became leading merchants in Middlesboro, the local commercial hub. Sana Pickus joined her sons in Beckley, West Virginia, and attended her first American high holiday services in a Presbyterian church that the town's Jewish community borrowed or rented for the occasion of her arrival.[3] Although atypical, the Weinsteins and Pickuses were hardly unique. A significant minority of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe ventured beyond major U.S. cities to settle in towns and rural areas throughout the country. Enough of them found their way to the nation's southern coalfields, in the heart of the Central Appalachian mountains, to form several small yet vital Jewish communities.

To understand why some immigrant Jews came to the coalfields, it is necessary to consider who they were and how they started. Like all immigrants, their old country experience combined with the conditions they encountered in America to shape their lives in the new land: rather than being "uprooted" from their past, they "transplanted" themselves, adapting old ways to their new environment.[4] The life experiences, skills, networks, and culture that Jews brought from their place of origin had a substantial impact on the communities they developed in southeastern Kentucky, southern West Virginia, and southwestern Virginia. For the vast majority, that place of origin can be traced to the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires of Eastern Europe.

A Brief History of the Jews in Eastern Europe

By the late nineteenth century Eastern Europe had long been home to the world's largest Jewish population. Jews had entered the region in substantial numbers starting in the thirteenth

century. As a dispersed and mostly landless minority, they had developed skills and networks in commercial pursuits. Welcomed by the rulers of Poland, Hungary, and Rumania, they found a niche as traders and artisans in a premodern agrarian economy. The Polish gentry in particular, which came to control the vast territory stretching from Poland to Lithuania, White Russia, and the Ukraine, found Jews to be most suited to serve as the economic link between noble and serf, as well as between the rural economy and the evolving international cash economy. Not only did Jews have far-reaching trade connections and experience, they had another invaluable attribute: as a low-status religious minority, they would be unable to mount a challenge to the gentry's hegemony, as the small Christian merchant class or lower nobility might, if given the opportunity. As Poland grew and flourished from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries—largely because of its prominence as supplier of grain to European and eastern markets—so did its Jewish communities, whose members filled all levels of commerce, from financiers, exporters, and estate managers to the much more numerous petty traders, tavern and innkeepers, teamsters, and artisans living in small towns and villages throughout the countryside.[5]

Like other ethnic groups within the greater Polish state, Jews enjoyed communal autonomy within their small towns (known as shtetls), enabling them to form their own communities and develop a way of life grounded in the precepts and rituals of Judaism. A distinctive East European Jewish culture grew out of the interaction between age-old Jewish tradition and the influences of the local environment. The hallmark of this culture was religious observance: for centuries, Judaism regulated every aspect of life, so that "it would be impossible to separate the religious from the secular—they (were) fused into one whole." For men, a life devoted to religious study was the ideal, though few were able to achieve it. For women, keeping a Jewish home was the paramount duty. The religious hierarchy clearly placed men ahead of women, yet

the female role involved responsibility for two key Jewish practices: observance of the dietary laws and preparations for the Sabbath, whose weekly observance set the tone for Jewish life. Meanwhile, both sexes shared the economic realm; it was neither unseemly nor uncommon for Jewish women to play an important role as breadwinner for the family. [6]

The religious concept of *tzedekah* governed communal affairs. Often translated inaccurately as "charity," its true meaning conveys a sense of communal obligation and social responsibility. Its imperative was "firmly woven into the organization of the community," resulting in a web of religiously-based charities and mutual aid societies. These institutions, along with the synagogue and religious school (for boys), promoted solidarity despite the substantial economic divisions that existed within Jewish communities and the constant friction such divisions produced.[7]

With its niche in the East European economy, the Jewish population served as a classic "entrepreneurial minority," or "middleman minority," terms coined by sociologists and historians to describe a worldwide phenomenon: in many agricultural societies, religious and/or ethnic minorities have occupied the economic position, or "status gap," between the ruling elite and the majority peasant population, performing necessary distributive and managerial functions yet never losing their standing as outsiders. The Chinese in Southeast Asia and Indians in colonial Africa represent two other prominent examples. In all these cases, ethnic minorities negotiated the terrain between indigenous, largely non-cash, rural economies and local to distant markets, serving as "intermediaries between the ruling elite and the masses, . . . between the producers and the consumers." While mixing on a daily basis with the majority, they remained separate by virtue of their own decision to preserve their cultural heritage as well as by their social status as,

literally, "out-castes" despised not only for their otherness, but for their willingness to take on tasks—such as trading or money lending—that traditional agrarian societies considered to be lowly at best, and at worst dishonorable or immoral. Their economic position enabled many of their number to achieve material success yet without the political power often associated with such success. [8]

As such societies moved toward capitalistic forms of economic organization, the activities traditionally carried out by middleman minorities positioned some of their number to play an important role in capital investment, market expansion, and economic innovation. Unfortunately, as a highly visible "other" involved in commercial activities, they proved ideal scapegoats to blame for the disruptions caused by economic transformation. Members of the majority, including elites, often came to see middleman minorities as the embodiment of capitalist values—and capitalist excess. They came to represent antithesis of rural values and stability, despite their long presence in the countryside and their place in the rural order. Doubts and fears about socioeconomic change were projected onto them, causing them to become considered a problematic element within the population and the target of hostility and retribution by those who suffered materially or socially in the transition to capitalism.[9]

While the middleman minority concept offers an intriguing cross-cultural perspective on ethnic relations within an evolving world system of capitalist expansion, when applied too broadly it ignores differences among as well as complexities within the societies to which it has been applied. Even the Jews of Eastern Europe, seen by scholars as the quintessential middleman minority, do not conform entirely to the model. For one thing, the Polish lands of the medieval and early modern period contained numerous ethnic groups; Jews were far from being the only minority. Historians identify Poland's heterogeneity as significant in allowing Polish Jewry to

flourish. As Gershon Hundert observes, "the status of Jews was most favorable in states of multiple nationality in which they were less conspicuous." Nevertheless, most of these ethnic groups inhabited their own distinct geographical locations, with Jewish communities dispersed among them, so that Jews were often the only prominent local minority surrounded by a majority population that was itself a minority group within the multi-ethnic Polish state.[10]

Some historians point out that the concept of "otherness" is often taken too far in the middleman minority literature. Jack Kugelmass stresses the intimacy of Jews and peasants in the Polish countryside, contending that economic interdependence and close proximity resulted in "an exchange of language and folklore that goes well beyond the apparent yet deceptive dissimilarity of religion, language, and social status." The ethnographic study *Life Is with People* documents this cultural exchange between Jews and their Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish peasant neighbors, highlighting shared superstitions, health care and child rearing practices, and economic customs (such as a propensity to bargain). The marketplace served as their main point of contact and symbolized "the interdependence, the reciprocity, the ambivalence that exist(ed) between Jew and Gentile." Daily economic intercourse bred familiarity between Jews and peasants, and this familiarity, combined with deep social, cultural, and religious disparities, led Kugelmass to use the paradoxical term "native aliens" to describe the Jews of Eastern Europe.[11]

Noting the longstanding, largely peaceful coexistence of Jews and peasants, Hillel Kieval suggests that even though differences in culture, religion, and economic position may have fostered an ongoing degree of mutual suspicion and misunderstanding, "outbreaks of anti-Jewish hostility may represent not the natural outcome of traditional entrepreneur-client relations but a significant disruption of conventional patterns and outcomes." Such outbreaks began to increase

as Eastern Europe moved into the modern era. In the mid-seventeenth century Poland entered a long period of economic decline that ultimately contributed to its destruction as an independent political entity. As conditions worsened, blame fell on the most visible representatives of the commercial economy, the Jews—even though they too suffered in the general economic malaise. Jews involved in the liquor industry, from distillers to tavern keepers, were especially singled out, accused of causing the "intoxication and impoverishment" of the peasantry. Throughout modern history, scapegoating of Jews has drawn power not only from economic relationships and conditions but also from ancient religious myths and aversions that come to the fore during times of trouble, often incited by the Christian church establishment or by people who stand to benefit directly from anti-semitism, such as politicians and economic competitors. These factors merged throughout the eighteenth century, and by the time neighboring states moved to carve up the former great power, Poland was widely perceived to suffer from a "Jewish problem."[12]

Most of Polish Jewry suddenly became Russian Jewry when the Russian Empire took over Lithuania, White Russia, most of the Ukraine, and much of Poland itself during the partitions of the Polish lands from the 1770s to 1790s. Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire nabbed the western and southern portions of the Polish state. The new Prussian Poland contained a significant number of Jews, whose history would merge with that of Central European Jewry. Austria-Hungary inherited a large Jewish population in the area of southeastern Poland known as Galicia. Conditions there kept Galician Jews tied to East European Jewry, yet, since Jews already lived in other parts of the empire, they did not represent a particularly unusual or foreign element to the Hapsburg rulers.[13]

The Russian Empire, however, went from having virtually no Jews to having the largest

Jewish population in the world. Because of the longstanding enmity of the Russian Orthodox church, Jews had been generally banned from Russia since medieval times. With the acquisition of Polish lands, Russian rulers found themselves faced with the task of integrating a variety of entirely new ethnic groups into their empire, yet the Jews constituted a special case, both because of their perceived culpability in Poland's economic decline as well as the animosity of the church. The tsarist regime embarked on a contradictory two-pronged approach to its new Jewish population: assimilation to submerge Jews into the larger society and segregation to protect vulnerable groups—peasants subject to "Jewish exploitation" and tradesmen subject to Jewish competition—from their perceived evil influence.[14]

Russia's Jewish policy through the nineteenth century shifted between those two poles, displaying a marked inconsistency which lent a deep instability to Jewish life. The most significant segregation measure occurred almost immediately: creation of the Jewish Pale of Settlement, which confined Jewish residency to the western parts of the empire they already inhabited, preventing them from moving to the Russian interior—although the boundaries of the Pale altered somewhat and later exceptions were made.[15] Assimilation measures took forms both cruel and benign, the most infamous being the conscription of young boys into the army, where they were forcibly converted to Christianity. This policy prompted a dread of conscription that lasted long after it was abolished; in any case, military service remained something Jews feared and avoided because of the abuse Jewish recruits encountered and the near-impossibility of following religious rituals while in the army. Jews were encouraged to attend Russian schools (to promote assimilation) and then subjected to restrictive quotas (to protect other students from Jewish competition); suddenly expelled from residency in certain areas and then sometimes allowed to move back; urged to engage in "productive" activities such as farming yet limited by

myriad and shifting prohibitions on landownership; denied access to certain occupations yet blamed for concentrating in the areas of the economy that remained open to them.[16]

Meanwhile, Eastern Europe's transition from feudalism to capitalism caused economic dislocation and social disruption which intensified in the late nineteenth century for Jews and non-Jews alike. Increased competition from distant markets crippled small-scale agriculture and enterprise while encouraging the consolidation of land and commerce. A rural crisis developed as population growth outstripped the land's ability to sustain its inhabitants. Peasants, petty traders, and artisans displaced from the countryside sought work in urban and industrial areas, but the emerging industrial sector did not develop quickly enough to absorb them. While a minority of the region's inhabitants benefited from new opportunities which began to open up, the more common outcome for all ethnic groups was impoverishment caused by the obliteration of their traditional role in the economy.[17]

As economic centralization and mechanization spread through Eastern Europe, vast numbers of Jews—small-scale traders and skilled workers—lost their livelihood. The construction of railroads, for example, threw thousands of teamsters (a traditionally Jewish occupation) out of work. It also introduced foreign grain imports and changed the way local crops were marketed, thus destroying the role of grain dealers such as the Pickuses. Chronic unemployment resulted, even as the Jewish workforce turned away from commerce and toward manufacturing. In the Pale, market forces and government policy combined to promote a dramatic occupational shift: in 1818 an estimated 86 percent of the Jewish workforce engaged in commerce, while by 1897 only 32 percent worked in commerce and 38 percent worked in manufacturing (skilled and unskilled). Economic change stimulated social change: the loss of customary occupations in the countryside, the movement to urban areas, the development of a

proletariat and ensuing conflict between Jewish workers and Jewish employers, the spread of secular education, and the exposure to modern ideas that accompanied urbanization—all began to cause a breakdown in societal traditions and communal solidarity.[18]

The transition to capitalism did not occur evenly throughout the region. It took place in fits and starts, with some areas undergoing rapid change as others became economic backwaters. As late as the turn of the twentieth century, Jews in much of the Lithuanian countryside continued to perform virtually all non-farming functions in a somewhat primitive agricultural economy, serving as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, raftsmen, teamsters, peddlers, millers, and estate lessees. Peasants and Jews alike barely eked out a living. Yet even this meager existence was threatened by increasingly-enforced legal restrictions against Jewish residency in the countryside.[19]

While Jews throughout Eastern Europe faced dire economic conditions, the situation in the Russian Empire became especially unbearable. Anti-Jewish violence rose as Jews found themselves blamed for the mounting social and economic crisis—with a new, racist, ethnically-based nationalism lending malevolent force to the accusations. The pogroms of 1881 to 1882, which destroyed life and property in over two hundred communities, mostly in the Ukraine, caused material distress for the immediate victims and psychological distress for the entire Jewish population of the Pale. The tsarist regime decided that the Jews had themselves provoked the riots and reacted with the oppressive May Laws of 1882, which ushered in an era of heightened anti-Jewish legislation. These laws prohibited Jews from purchasing real estate, led to more frequent expulsions from the countryside, and made it difficult for them to own land or engage in certain trades. Forbidden to leave the Pale, Jews from the countryside crowded into the region's larger towns and cities, where there was not enough work to go around. Discrimination

in some industrial sectors (particularly heavy industry) and a general dearth of capital caused them to gravitate to the low-capital, labor intensive clothing industry, where they filled all ranks and suffered from intense competition. Meanwhile, their status as an officially-despised group encouraged further harassment, from low-level, routine abuse to an outbreak of devastating pogroms between 1903 and 1906, much more virulent than the pogroms of the 1880s.[20]

Suffering from economic devastation and in the midst of a social transformation which had loosened the bonds of community and tradition, Russian Jews proved highly receptive to the drastic solutions which emerged in the wake of violence and repression. Many people flocked to political movements such as socialism, communism, and Zionism. But for the masses of Jews who increasingly saw no economic or social future for themselves in Russia, the answer seemed more obvious: departure.[21]

Although the pogroms and May Laws served as a potent catalyst for the emigration movement that gathered steam in the 1880s, the economic disruptions caused by modernization must be considered the underlying cause. Jews began to leave Russia in modest yet significant numbers well before the pogroms. As early as 1869 a Hebrew-language newspaper declared that "the reasons for this emigration are the shrinking possibilities of gaining a livelihood and the fear of military service." Moreover, Russian Jews were far from alone in their desire to leave their native land—across Europe, economic transformation with its accompanying social and political turmoil spread from west to east, leaving great migrations in its wake. Wrenching changes in the German states had sparked a massive movement to America in the mid-nineteenth century which included some two hundred thousand German Jews who would pave the way for their eastern co-religionists. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw millions of Southern and

Eastern Europeans migrate to growing industrial centers in their own and neighboring countries as well as overseas. [22]

Migration from Austria-Hungary to America almost tripled in the single year between 1879 and 1880, ushering in a thirty-year period that would bring more than three million residents of that multi-national empire to the U.S. Among them were Jews from Galicia and Hungary. Unlike Tsarist Russia, the Hapsburg empire had abolished most legal restrictions against Jews and they had begun to integrate into the empire's political, economic, and social life, though they still faced some popular hostility and official discrimination. According to one historian, "Jewish emigration from Galicia was entirely motivated by poverty . . . that caused mass emigration of both Jews and non-Jews." In Hungary, reported the U.S. Immigration Commission in 1911, "The backward state of industrial development, . . . generally impoverished resources, . . . and the growth of a population which the land can not support" led to widespread emigration. The report merely listed Jews among Austria-Hungary's many migrating ethnic groups, but devoted an entire section to Jews in the Russian Empire, noting that government restrictions and popular violence, along with economic conditions, gave them "double cause for emigration." In fact, Jews in the Russian Empire emigrated in much larger percentages than either the Jews of Austria-Hungary or other ethnic groups emigrating from Russia, indicating that legal liabilities, persecutions, and pogroms provided an additional and powerful motivating force.[23]

Emigration was a complex phenomenon influenced by many factors. As historian Simon Kuznets points out, European migration to America followed a similar pattern among all ethnic groups of the era: first a trickle, then a moderate flow, then an explosive rise. He attributes this, in part, to the decreasing costs of migration, as shipping rates lowered and as early migrants provided information and financial assistance to those who followed in their footsteps.

Emigration did not develop evenly among the Jewish population. Lithuanians, who suffered most from overcrowding, unemployment, and poverty, were over-represented until after the turn of the century, when the pogroms that swept through southwestern Russia triggered "emigration fever" there. For many young men—both Jews and non-Jews—the prospect of conscription into the Russian army provided the most immediate stimulus to departure. Meanwhile, the "pull" of America combined with the "push" of local conditions. States historian Stephen Berk, "knowledge of the free, dynamic, wealthy nation burgeoning overseas was penetrating into the nooks and crannies of the Pale." While rumor may have overstated the opportunities and lifestyle available to newly-arrived immigrants, the Jewish press and earlier emigrants provided credible information on the booming U.S. economy, not to mention America's tradition of religious tolerance and legal rights. Debates raged among Jews about whether Palestine or America should be their destination, but difficulties in reaching and settling in the Holy Land, controlled by the less-than-receptive rulers of the Ottoman Empire, dictated that only the most ideologically committed would go there. Millions of ordinary people fixed their sights on the "Goldeneh Medinah" (Golden Land), America.[24]

The East European Legacy and Central Appalachian Jews

The East European Jews who migrated to the U.S emerged from a traditional way of life developed over centuries yet tempered by the modernizing trends of the late nineteenth century. A close-knit family- and communally-based culture continued to exert a powerful hold over the bulk of the population. Despite widespread urbanization most people were not too far removed from their shtetl origins while many clung tenuously to their rural niche. The tenets of Orthodox Judaism still permeated Jewish life, though the very fact of mass emigration showed that the

influence of religion was not as dominant as it once had been. Rabbis had warned against America, calling it a heathen land where Jews turned away from their heritage; these admonitions gradually lost force as more and more people made the decision to leave. Although the most pious Jews remained least likely to emigrate, the majority of those who ventured across the ocean, representing a large cross section of Jewish society, considered themselves to be observant Jews, and they brought their traditional practices with them.[25]

Their social position and economic circumstances had accustomed Jewish immigrants to a life of instability. Even those who achieved a measure of economic success knew that their good fortune could be snatched away at any moment. Memoirs of life in the old country often emphasize this lack of security. For example, David Toback's chronicle of his family's travails includes everything from sudden forced expulsion from their home to ordinary business insolvency; as he matter-of-factly states about his father, a miller, "each of his enterprises failed, and we moved around a lot." As historian Ewa Morawska observes, Jewish folk-sayings echo this sense of "chronic uncertainty." She cites two typical Yiddishisms: "Jewish wealth is like snow in March, here today, gone tomorrow," and "a Jew's joy is not without fright."[26]

Morawska notes that this sense of the unpredictability of life was paradoxically accompanied by a strong belief in human agency, derived from Judaic teachings on the importance of free will. In other words, though individuals may have no control over fate, they are nevertheless required to act to improve their lives. Jewish culture thus contained a keen sense of the ambiguities and contradictions of human existence, which was reinforced by the anomalous position of Jews in East European society. They brought to their new homes the experience of being strangers in a strange land, despite their centuries-long presence in Eastern Europe. They were familiar with, and often adept at, cross cultural communication. Many

possessed a knowledge of different languages that would prove useful in America.[27]

Despite these commonalties, the Jewish population, dispersed throughout a vast region that spread over two empires and encompassed many other different ethnic groups, could not help but display a considerable degree of diversity. Jewish literature contains many references to the regional differences among Jews and the stereotypes that arose as a result. Polish Jews, known for their emotionalism and deep religiosity, looked askance at the "Litvaks" (Jews from Lithuania), who were considered rational to the point of heresy. Meanwhile, Galician Jews from the Austro-Hungarian empire looked down on their "backward" co-religionists in the Pale. Variations also existed within each region, particularly between rural and urban dwellers. Even the economic realm exhibited diversity. Within their traditional commercial niche Jews had followed a wide variety of occupations; when the shift to manufacturing occurred, a similar pattern emerged: though confined to certain sectors, Jews filled all roles within those sectors. Even as the majority of Jews suffered increasing economic distress, wide gradations of wealth and poverty could be found within most communities.[28]

The Jewish immigrants who arrived in Central Appalachia shared in the East European legacy. They came from throughout the region, from the Russian Pale and Russian Poland, from Galicia, Hungary, and Rumania.[29] Their hometowns were buffeted by the social currents sweeping Eastern Europe, where the forces of modernity and traditionalism vied for the hearts and minds of ordinary Jews. The Totz, Foreman, and Bank families, related by marriage before emigration, hailed from Raseiniai, Lithuania, a medium-sized town and one of the centers of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), a movement that promoted the modernization of European Jewry. Israel Noah Spector and his brothers, on the other hand, came from the Ukrainian city of

Nezhin, a center of the ultra-religious Hasidic movement; he was named for famed Hasidic leader (and Nezhin resident) Israel Noah Schneerson. Evidently their differences were not irreconcilable since the Totzes and Spectors intermarried in the U.S. Foremans, Spectors, Banks, and Totzes lived in several small towns in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. The Starer brothers, Dave, Moe, and Abe, came to Pocahontas, Virginia, and Kimball, West Virginia, from the small Galician town of Zablotów, another Hasidic stronghold, while the small town of Bolechów, "a cradle of the Jewish Enlightenment movement in eastern Galicia," was the starting point for future Matewan, West Virginia, tailor Abe Scherer. The four Seligman brothers grew up in the Lithuanian hamlet of Ylakiai as sons of a Hebrew *maskil* (adherent of the Haskalah) who raised them to be fine scholars. A rabbi who served briefly in the coalfields remarked of these Northfork, West Virginia, merchants that "It was a revelation to me to find Jewish laymen in an obscure coal town who could read and understand modern Hebrew."[30]

Central Appalachian Jews hailed from Eastern Europe's largest cities as well as the small towns and villages of the countryside. Budapest sisters Charlotte, Pauline, and Gizella Wilczek married three friends from small Hungarian towns who brought them to Logan, West Virginia. From the Latvian port city of Libau came the Michaelson brothers, Sol, Max, and Ted, tailors who plied their trade in the tiny coal town of Davy, West Virginia. Chaim Brownstein started out in a Jewish agricultural colony in Bessarabia and ended up in an unincorporated hamlet in Logan County, West Virginia. Mary Schwachter fled an impoverished farm and a "religious fanatic" husband in the mountainous Transylvanian region of Austria-Hungary, taking two sons with her. She moved to Pocahontas, Virginia, and her son Harry eventually became a prosperous merchant in Williamson, West Virginia. The Lopinsky family, prominent in the southern West Virginia coalfields as well as the state capital of Charleston, originated in the small town of Jonava, in the

forests of Lithuania where the timber industry held sway. David Skot (later Scott) ran away from home at the age of fifteen, leaving Kolk, "a town of poverty" in the Ukraine, for a land where "the streets were paved with gold"—ultimately, Welch, West Virginia.[31]

Amidst this diversity, some patterns can be discerned which suggest that the unusual decision to move to the coalfields was influenced, at least in part, by the particular old country origins of Central Appalachian Jews. On the whole, Jews who settled in small coalfield towns tended to come from more rural backgrounds than the general East European Jewish population. By 1897, almost half of the Jews in the Russian Pale lived in incorporated cities.[32] The majority of Jewish immigrants to the coalfields, on the other hand, originated in the shtetls and villages of Eastern Europe. Of the coalfield immigrants whose birthplaces could be identified, almost 60 percent came from towns of less than five thousand inhabitants. More than 70 percent came from towns of less than ten thousand inhabitants.[33]

These figures support the theory that immigrants sought U.S. locales with similar characteristics to the places they left behind, where conditions would be somewhat familiar and where they would be able to draw on past experiences and previously-acquired skills to earn a livelihood. Other studies have noted that, for example, Jewish immigrants to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, were more likely to have a background in rural petty trade than the general East European Jewish migration stream (in which skilled workers were highly over-represented); Jews who joined agricultural colonies in Argentina came from the southern parts of the Russian Pale where Jewish farming had been encouraged by the tsarist regime; the French-speaking Louisiana countryside attracted Jews from rural, French-speaking Alsace-Lorraine who wanted to continue to pursue economic activities that were increasingly difficult to carry out in the old country. Thus the act of immigration, seemingly a radical step, had its conservative impulse, as immigrants

sought environments that would allow them to continue to do what they could no longer do in their homeland because of deteriorating economic or social conditions.[34]

Broad geographic trends are also apparent in the origins of coalfield Jews. More than 72 percent came from the Russian Empire, with 16 percent from Austria-Hungary and 3 percent from Rumania. (Seven percent were from Western or Central Europe, primarily Germany.) Though Jews migrated to the coalfields from all over Eastern Europe, Lithuania and Hungary provided a disproportionate share, accounting for 45 percent of those with known regional origins. The two groups were not only the largest Jewish groups in the coalfields, they were also the earliest (along with some German Jews), accounting for 53 percent of those who arrived before 1900. Since Poland and the Ukraine had much larger Jewish populations than Lithuania or Hungary, the over-representation of Lithuanians and Hungarians in the coalfields appears striking. Three factors account for their disproportionate presence: the over-representation of those two groups in the earlier stages of Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the U.S.; the possibility that early Jewish migrants to America were more likely to move away from U.S. port cities than later migrants; and the impact of chain migration.

Austro-Hungarian Jews made their greatest impact on the East European Jewish migration stream between 1881 and 1902. They contributed 20 to 26 percent annually of Jewish immigrants to the U.S. during that period, while from 1903 and 1914 they contributed only 15 to 16 percent. (These figures apply primarily to Hungary and Galicia, where most of the empire's Jews migrated from.) Meanwhile, Lithuanian Jews emigrated in higher proportions than other Russian Jews in the early years because they suffered the worst economic conditions in the Pale. The "economic stagnation and almost total absence of industry" in the small commercial centers of the Lithuanian countryside, reported a 1907 study, meant that "These little towns supply a large

number of the Jewish emigrants to the United States."[35]

The over-representation of Lithuanian Jews in the migration stream diminished after savage pogroms struck southwest Russia in the first decade of the new century, sparking movement from that region. Yet by the time of the pogroms of 1903 to 1906, most of the foreign-born Jews who lived (or would eventually live) in the coalfields had already come to the U.S. Fully 60 percent of East European-born coalfield Jews had arrived in America (though not necessarily the coalfields) by 1903, while only one-third of all East European Jewish immigrants to the U.S. had arrived. It is not surprising, therefore, that the coalfield Jewish population was weighted toward those regional groups that had a large presence early in the migration stream.[36]

The relatively early immigration of coalfield Jews compared to the general East European Jewish immigrant population supports the hypothesis of American Jewish historians that earlier East European Jewish immigrants tended to move away from their first homes in U.S. port cities in greater proportions than later arrivals. It is unclear why these earlier arrivals may have been more likely to quit their first American homes. Perhaps economic opportunities in large cities (especially New York) increased for later immigrants—or opportunities in the U.S. hinterland were more prevalent earlier in the period than they were later.[37]

The pervasive phenomenon of chain migration provides the best explanation of trends related to the origins of Central Appalachian Jews. All great migrations have been heavily influenced by kin-based networks, and Jewish migrants to the coalfields offer no exception. Most came to the region not as isolated individuals, but as parts of families whose members arrived together or, more commonly, in succession, with early settlers encouraging relatives to join them either directly from Europe or from their first homes in the U.S. These settlers may well have had a predilection for small town life because of their roots in the Eastern European countryside—

and the circumstances they encountered in the U.S. also helped lead them to the coalfields, as will be seen. Yet the concentrations from certain Eastern European locales evident among coalfield Jews are largely the result of migration chains, with other factors playing a lesser role. The extended family of Ida Euster serves as a good example: she and her six sons, two daughters, their spouses, cousin, and boarder all settled in Pineville and Middlesboro, Kentucky, between 1890 and 1920. Together they accounted for three-quarters of the Rumanian Jews in the coalfields, and provide the reason why Rumanians made up at least three percent of coalfield Jewish immigrants.[38]

Journey to America

While Jews who ended up in Central Appalachia may have differed in some respects from the general Jewish migration stream, they shared in all the reasons for quitting the old country. Their stories reveal the same lack of economic opportunity, fear of conscription, and oppression that caused millions to emigrate. While economic motivations were paramount, other factors also pertained. Bernard Silverman was born in Kishinev in 1902; his family arrived in the U.S. in 1904, not long after the infamous Kishinev pogrom. When the tsar's troops came to eighteen-year-old Louis Fink's corner of the Ukraine in pursuit of fresh recruits, he fled to the nearest port. Both ended up in Beckley, West Virginia. Some young people were motivated by adventure as much as anything else; when thirteen-year-old Joseph Lopinsky could not convince his fairly well-to-do parents to leave Lithuania, he "appropriated to himself money enough to pay his way and ran off for America." At Hamburg he wrote them that he was about to sail to the U.S.[39]

Yet for most, the journey out of Eastern Europe was not so easily undertaken. The story of James Pickus is perhaps more typical: although he managed to acquire a passport which would

enable him to join his brothers in Beckley, he postponed his travel when his mother's home in Minsk province was struck by fire. After helping her recover, he found that his visa had expired. Unable to get it renewed, he had to be smuggled across the border. Such illegal border crossings were rampant, since permanent emigration from the Russian Empire was forbidden by law and passports for temporary travel were costly and difficult to obtain. Russian passport laws, notoriously inconsistent and contradictory (and their enforcement even more so), made it "very difficult for a Russian subject to leave his native land in a lawful manner," as the 1911 U.S. Immigration Commission put it. Potential emigrants suffered lengthy bureaucratic delays and reversals. They often had to resort to bribing officials and border guards, obtaining false passports, or crossing the border secretly in the dead of night. An entire industry—mostly Jewish-operated—developed to assist people to leave, from the agents of European steamship companies to smugglers who illegally conveyed people across the border. These individuals and organizations ranged from the merely unscrupulous to the downright criminal, and with no government regulation of their activities, found myriad opportunities to cheat and exploit would-be emigrants. While local officials pursued the profits to be made from illegal emigration, the upper levels of the Russian government chose to look the other way as Jews and other non-desirable ethnic groups (Poles, especially) streamed for the borders. Jewish aid societies and voluntary associations of emigrants arose to help travelers through their ordeal, but it is unclear how many people actually benefited from such groups.[40]

In Austria-Hungary emigration was not forbidden and borders were easily crossed. Nevertheless, all East European emigrants faced the hazards of fraud, theft, and other forms of abuse as they journeyed from their homes to European port cities and across the ocean, leading one historian to describe the process as "arduous . . . (often) inhumane and barbaric." While

Russia and Austria-Hungary had their own ports at Libau, Odessa, and Fiume, most travelers carried steamship tickets of companies based in the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen. Travel through Germany was strictly regulated by the authorities, with prison-like conditions for those in transit. German officials set up control stations on the Russian and Austrian borders to examine the emigrants; those who posed a potential public health problem were turned back. The steamship companies performed similar physical examinations once the travelers reached their embarkation points. Since American law required that the companies pay for the return voyage of emigrants debarred from the U.S. for health reasons, they were quick to reject those who might not pass inspection by U.S. officials. (These European inspections had much to do with the low rate of deportation from Ellis Island and other U.S. points of debarkation.)[41]

Once safely aboard ship, passengers in the low-paying steerage section had to endure intensely cramped quarters. James Pickus's son Manuel vividly recalls his father's description: "They were stuffed in like pickles in a jar." Such overcrowding bred highly unsanitary conditions. With near-inedible food, mistreatment by crew members, and seasickness added to the mix, steerage travelers spent the ten- to sixteen-day voyage in varying degrees of misery.[42]

However, because steamships had completely replaced sailing ships by the 1880s, the transatlantic journey was cheaper, safer, and faster than ever before. While socioeconomic push and pull factors may have motivated millions throughout Europe to quit the old country, this technological advancement in shipping enabled the great migration of 1880 to 1924 to become a reality. For laborers who had already become accustomed to seasonal migration within Europe, America simply became another destination where job opportunities could feasibly be pursued. The U.S. also became more attainable for those who desired permanent relocation. As historian Walter Nugent wryly points out, "Families could migrate and expect to arrive intact." Both types

of migration, temporary and permanent, occurred during the period.[43]

Because of the social and legal liabilities they suffered in the Russian Empire as well as rising anti-semitism throughout Eastern Europe, Jews showed a greater inclination toward permanent settlement in the U.S. than all other groups who came during the era, except the Irish. Though single males were over-represented among Jews, as they were among virtually all ethnic groups, Jewish immigration tended to be a family undertaking. Females made up 44 percent of all Jewish immigrants to America between 1899 and 1914, compared to 30 percent of non-Jewish immigrants; children under fourteen made up a quarter of Jewish immigrants, while they made up only 11 percent of non-Jewish immigrants. And Jews were far less likely to return to Europe than non-Jews. Although historian Jonathan Sarna has exploded the commonly-accepted "myth of no return" by reporting that the Jewish return migration rate exceeded 20 percent between 1881 and 1900, this was well below the 35 to 50 percent return migration rates of non-Jewish ethnic groups from Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Jewish return migration rate tumbled to 6 to 7 percent after 1900 with no corresponding drop for other groups—a good indication of how Jews viewed their chances for a decent life in Russia.[44]

Although Jews migrated as families, breadwinners often came over first, with other family members following once their fares had been earned for them in America. Many coalfield Jews followed this pattern. Joseph Cohen came to the U.S. at age thirty-four in 1898 and by 1900 owned a store in Norton, Virginia, where he boarded at a hotel. By 1902 he had brought his wife Anna and four children over from Russia and by 1910 the couple and their six children resided in their own home in Norton. Coalfield census records describe several other Jewish men as married yet living alone (usually in a boarding house), indicating that they probably had spouses and children still in Europe. Not all trailblazers were male—Mary Schwachter, unable to pay for

the journey to America for herself and her two boys, deposited them in Budapest where thirteen-year-old Harry became an apprentice department store clerk. She went on to the U.S. with her sister, and three years later sent steamship tickets to her sons. By then the future Williamson, West Virginia, businessman had become an active member of the Hungarian Socialist Youth (an avocation he probably did not pursue in Mingo County). The resourceful teenager had a better voyage than most: while his brother remained confined to his bunk with seasickness, Harry and a "slight, dark Rumanian girl" spent the evenings dancing to music provided by some fellow steerage passengers, while onlookers from the upper decks tossed coins down to the entertainers. He made a net profit of $7.30 on the journey.[45]

Encountering the American Reality

Harry Schwachter may have demonstrated more entrepreneurial spirit than the average steerage passenger (or at least, superior dancing abilities), but everyone who landed in America during the 1880 to 1924 immigration wave would need a certain amount of resourcefulness to find his or her way in the dynamic U.S. economy. The skills, networks, and resources that immigrants brought from Europe would interact with the circumstances they encountered here to determine their position in the economy, their adaptation to America, even the geographic distribution of their particular ethnic group. Most immigrants chose to settle in the growing industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, where employment opportunities were plentiful. However, rapid mechanization meant that jobs were increasingly unskilled and low paying. Immigrants who arrived with skills that could be transferred to their new environment found economic mobility more attainable than those—the vast majority—forced to seek work in the lower levels of the economy. Yet skilled or unskilled, most immigrants relied on ethnic and kin-

based networks to ease their way into the job market and to guide them to various parts of the country. These networks became the basis of the ethnic neighborhoods and institutions of urban America, and proved invaluable to the immigrants' adjustment to American life.[46]

The late nineteenth century saw industrial capitalism hit its stride in the U.S. It was an era marked by increasing use of mass production methods, expansion of markets, business growth and consolidation, and industrial labor shortages. Several factors helped East European Jews find their place in this booming economy. Unlike members of most immigrant groups, many Jews did arrive with skills that could be readily transferred. Almost two-thirds of the Russian Jewish immigrant workforce consisted of those who had been skilled workers in the old country and of those, over half had been employed in the clothing industry. In fact, some 30 percent of all Russian Jewish workers who came to America between 1899 and 1914 were tailors or seamstresses. Jewish immigrants found ready opportunity in the garment industry, which not only was undergoing rapid expansion, but was already largely dominated by German Jews, who proved receptive to employing their newly-arrived co-religionists.[47]

Like the Eastern Europeans, most German Jewish immigrants had been petty traders and artisans in the old country as a result of similar, centuries-old socioeconomic forces. By the nineteenth century, changes in the Central European political and social environment led them to begin integrating into the larger society, though this did not forestall substantial emigration, which occurred primarily for economic reasons.[48] Their arrival in America in the mid-nineteenth century coincided with the birth of the ready-to-wear clothing industry. German Jewish immigrants with experience in trade but limited financial resources entered into all facets of the new industry, which required only a small capital investment and, moreover, was "dominated by no business aristocracy and responsive to new ideas." Those most recently arrived from Europe

found opportunity "in the one profession universally open to them: peddling." Dispersing throughout rural America, peddlers helped increase the market for ready-made clothing while enabling themselves to get started in business. From itinerancy they moved into shopkeeping, becoming the mainstays of downtown business districts in numerous small towns and cities. Settling throughout the country, and particularly in the mid-nineteenth century's growth areas—the Ohio Valley and the Midwest—German Jews achieved rapid economic mobility.[49]

By the time the Eastern Europeans arrived, the Germans had emerged as a fairly established and acculturated American Jewish community. Although economic, social, and cultural tensions between America's German- and East European-based Jewish communities would become legendary, there can be no doubt that the existence of a small but well-established American Jewish population of primarily German origin aided in the adaptation of East European Jews by providing employment opportunities, as well as by setting up social services and advocating for public policies favorable to immigrants.[50]

Timing, the opportunities offered by the American economy, and pre-migration skills were just some of the elements that influenced the economic destiny of East European Jews. Other factors were perhaps more intangible. The more permanent nature of the Jewish migration may have given Jews greater motivation to try to improve their circumstances than immigrants who saw their time in America as temporary. In his study of Italian and Jewish immigrants in New York City, Thomas Kessner asserts that the combination of pre-migration skills and permanent orientation enabled Jews to "land higher on the status ladder than Italians" and achieve greater economic mobility. Moreover, even though most Jews arrived as skilled workers, they came from families and communities rooted in trade and commerce, and were thus more prepared than other immigrants to make their way in an environment that rewarded market values and enterprising

behavior. As Kessner put it, "The 'middlemen of Europe' brought more entrepreneurial savvy and 'middle class' values." Ironically, the very commercial traits for which Jews were denounced in Eastern Europe would prove advantageous in their new home. Also, Jewish religious doctrines concerning the importance of human agency and free will emphasized that human beings must strive toward a particular "end-goal" or goals, an orientation expressed in the concept of *takhlis* (derived from "the Hebrew root meaning to 'complete, finish, end, accomplish, fulfill, consume'"). When carried over to the economic realm, *takhlis* encouraged the kind of long-term decision making and striving toward success that facilitated mobility.[51]

The garment industry provided a solid base for launching Jewish economic life in the U.S. The vast numbers of East European Jewish immigrants soon dwarfed the existing American Jewish population, and Eastern Europeans gradually took over leadership of the industry from the German Jews. Jewish immigrant neighborhoods enabled the flourishing of an internal ethnic-based economy, and many Jews managed to avoid employment in the garment industry by instead providing a variety of goods and services to their fellow immigrants.[52]

Unfortunately, the propitious timing of mass migration did not mean that the immigrants—Jewish or otherwise—would avoid hardship and suffering in their new homes. Most of them experienced American industrial capitalism as cruel and unforgiving. Where immigrants found opportunities to work, employers found vast opportunities to exploit. Workers faced harsh and dangerous conditions, meager pay, and long hours, especially in the unskilled sectors of the economy. The spread of mechanization and mass production techniques in the garment industry caused this sector to constantly expand, with a corresponding drop in the fortunes of Jewish immigrants. It did not help that their employers were also Jewish. As writer Irving Howe put it,

"The relations between German and East European Jews in the garment industry during the eighties and nineties were often those of class enemies," and once Eastern Europeans took over the upper levels of the industry, Jewish bosses continued to "hire greenhorns whom they could exploit with familial rapacity." Those who tried to escape the sweatshops and factories by becoming pushcart peddlers or opening small shops confronted fierce competition from like-minded fellow immigrants in overpopulated urban neighborhoods. Despite the existence of a vibrant ethnic economy, says Howe, "The majority of Jewish immigrants . . . could not hope to escape the traumas of proletarianization."[53]

Overcrowding, inferior housing, and poor sanitation encouraged disease and a variety of social ills in immigrant neighborhoods throughout urban America. Conflict within and among different immigrant groups proved unavoidable in a situation where people from a variety of cultures lived together in crowded and poverty-stricken conditions. Meanwhile, old stock Americans, shocked by the changing face of the urban landscape, displayed increasingly nativist tendencies, with anti-semitism as a prominent component. The Jews' concentration in certain economic sectors was not entirely the result of their pre-migration background, since they faced discrimination in some industries. For example, a study of Jewish wage earners in Pittsburgh noted "rabid anti-Semitism which existed at the mills and the mines, both among the workers imported from Eastern Europe and among the employers." Jewish workers therefore clustered in the city's garment industry and its cigar-making industry, another traditionally Jewish occupation extending back to the old country.[54]

Jewish immigrants responded to the realities of American life with a variety of strategies to ensure their economic and spiritual survival, improve their working and living conditions, and, if possible, advance up the economic ladder. By relying on Jewish networks in largely Jewish

economic arenas, they avoided discrimination while assisting relatives and friends to get ahead. Like most immigrant groups, they continued the old country practice of involving husbands, wives, and children in work toward family subsistence. In America, while single Jewish women and girls went out to work in sweatshops and factories, most married women worked from their homes; they took in piece work, laundry, or boarders or worked in their family's small (usually adjacent) shop. Jews, male and female, also drew on their experiences in the old country to forge a dynamic labor movement that fought for—and often won—higher pay and better working conditions. Mutual aid associations, often based on hometown origins, provided everything from burial services to insurance to small loans to sociability. Some strategies could not be described as entirely positive; a not insignificant number of Jews resorted to various types of vice and crime to earn a livelihood, as an organized Jewish underworld took shape.[55]

While some immigrants did manage to overcome the difficulties of their situation and achieve a measure of success, many others simply learned to lower their immediate expectations to focus on daily survival. Yet the concept of *takhlis* remained powerful, as immigrants transferred their goals and dreams onto their children. Indeed, while most in the immigrant generation experienced only a "slow improvement" in their condition during their lifetime, economic mobility would occur among the second generation, inheritors of the drives and ambitions of their elders. In the meantime, immigrant Jews created a vibrant urban culture that helped sustain them: a blend of family togetherness, religious observance, labor movement culture, street life, and, most of all, *Yiddishkeit*.[56]

A small but significant minority of Jewish immigrants devised yet another solution to the adverse conditions and excessive competition of the big cities: they left. Because census statistics do not reveal religious affiliation, their numbers are difficult to determine. But as many as 30

percent of East European Jews chose to settle outside of major metropolitan areas, opting instead for the nation's smaller cities and towns. As noted earlier, this course of action may have appealed to immigrants who originated in the less populous shtetls and villages of Eastern Europe. Yet, whether they sought to duplicate their rural old country role or whether they simply felt restricted by circumstances in the large cities, their primary motivation was economic.[57]

East European Jews who migrated away from large cities sought possibilities for self-employment that proved elusive in places such as New York City, despite the undeniable opportunities of the urban industrial economy. Less populated locales offered a different type of opportunity: in the nation's principal urban centers at the turn of the century, 60 percent of Jews worked in manufacturing, while in small cities and towns, 70 percent were employed in trade and service. Through the same kinds of ethnic networks that brought the immigrants to metropolitan areas across the U.S., some Jewish immigrants learned about possibilities in less obvious places. Like the German Jews of the mid-nineteenth century, Eastern Europeans who migrated to smaller cities and towns often got their start as peddlers and then opened retail establishments. Their economic profile, therefore, more closely resembled their German Jewish predecessors than their big city relatives.[58]

However, this route taken by some East European Jews has long been obscured in both popular and scholarly writing on American Jewry, as the overwhelming focus has been on the urban Jewish experience and particularly on the Jews of New York City. Some historians have protested the stereotypical profile of American Jewry which contrasts German-based small Jewish communities with big-city East European Jews. They note that East European migration chains bolstered existing small-town German-Jewish settlements throughout America while also creating hundreds of new communities, thus becoming a critical demographic element in small-

town Jewry and providing a counterpoint to the urban experience of the majority of East European Jews in America.[59]

Most future coalfield residents first obtained less-than-sustaining work in the Jewish-oriented industries of major cities. Among those struggling to earn a living in New York City's garment industry were the brothers from Lithuania, Sam and Herman Weinstein. As they later told it, they felt like "strangers in a strange land and suffered many hardships. . . . The men in the sweat-shops said to Herman: 'This is a big country. Get out of here, you can't do much worse'." Meanwhile, having run away from his comfortable Lithuanian home, young Joe Lopinsky landed in New York in 1884 "without a dollar, without language and without a known friend." He tried to survive on low-paying factory work before striking out for more promising territory. Years later, his cousin Sam Abrams suffered the failure of his small notions store in Brooklyn. Faced with the prospect of starting again from scratch, Abrams contacted his Lopinsky relatives in West Virginia. After arriving from Hungary in 1900, Rudolph Eiland found work in a New York cigar factory. In Cincinnati, Isadore and Lizzie Weiner also clung to cigar factory jobs in order to support their young family in the 1910s. Still others found jobs wherever they could. Shortly after his arrival in Baltimore in 1898, David Scott hitchhiked to Washington, D.C., where he worked cleaning a theater and as a Western Union messenger boy. He slept at the theater at night, or at the Salvation Army. Sam Polon also landed in Baltimore, where "he got such jobs as he could pick up, painted N&W cars, and did odd jobs such as loading drays, etc."[60]

Baltimore's Jewish community supplied many coalfield residents. Annie Wasserkrug, daughter of struggling immigrants, left school in the sixth grade to work "in the needle trade." She married tailor Louis Fink, and they eventually opened a small grocery store near the

Baltimore & Ohio Railroad terminus. They managed to scrape together enough money to seek out a better opportunity. According to their son, "Salesmen who used to call . . . told (Louis Fink) about West Virginia and the black diamonds. He became fascinated with that."[61]

These stories typify the experience of Jewish immigrants who eventually settled in Central Appalachia. The majority landed in New York City, though a substantial minority arrived at the port of Baltimore. Unless they already had connections in the coalfields, they generally lived and worked for some years in the immigrant enclaves of those two cities before deciding to venture out. Some came to the U.S. as children and spent their youth in Baltimore or New York, migrating to the coalfields as young adults. Interviews with the descendants of coalfield Jewish immigrants reveal that the desire for self-employment drove many of them to leave their first American homes. As more than one interviewee put it, their parents' "dream" was to own a store, rather than work for somebody else. Dissatisfied with their life chances in the big city, they had reason to believe that prospects for success would be greater in the mountains of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, or southwestern Virginia.[62]

This motivation was not far removed from the impulse that brought them across the ocean. Historian Moses Kligsberg insists that "neither poverty nor hunger nor discrimination was the *principal* motive for Jewish emigration," although these afflictions were very real. Rather, modernizing forces caused a loosening of "the hegemony of the religious-traditional conception of *takhlis*." The theologically-based idea that an individual should have an end-goal remained strong, but was no longer directed toward Torah study and religious life. Instead, "large numbers of Jews transferred their search for *takhlis* to the outside world." This search, asserts Kligsberg, provided the primary motivating principal for emigration. As oppressive conditions in Eastern Europe convinced many that "the opportunity of individual self-realization" could not be

achieved there, they responded by moving to America.[63]

A small number would continue to pursue their goal by journeying to the Central Appalachian coalfields. Paradoxically, the region attracted them because it was undergoing the same sort of transformation as the land they had recently escaped: transition from a rural, locally-based economy to an industrial capitalist economy fully linked with national and international markets. In other words, the "town of poverty" in the Ukraine that David Scott fled had more in common with the "streets paved with gold" in the U.S. than he ever would have suspected.[64] But whereas the socioeconomic changes occurring in Eastern Europe boded ill for most of the Jewish population, the changes taking place in the Central Appalachian mountains would provide many Jewish immigrants with the opportunity they sought.

Central Appalachia and its Preindustrial Past

Two overriding characteristics have shaped the history of the Central Appalachian plateau: its succession of steep, rugged mountains and the vast reserves of coal and timber they contain. The mountainous terrain, by impeding the advancement of transportation networks, ensured that full-fledged capitalist development would come relatively late. With only limited access to outside markets before the railroad arrived in the late nineteenth century, the local economy revolved around self-sufficient farming by a small, scattered population. Coal and timber, abundant and lucrative commodities in great demand by a booming national economy, ensured that once railroads finally did penetrate the region starting in the 1870s, development would occur fast and furiously. With coal as the driving force, the mountains of southwestern Virginia, southern West Virginia, and eastern Kentucky experienced rapid industrialization and precipitous growth from the 1880s through the 1910s.

This time period, of course, coincided exactly with the arrival of Eastern European Jews to the U.S. Thus it should not be surprising that some Jewish immigrants, having run up against the limitations of America's urban environment, found their way to the mountains to explore the opportunities that the coal and timber booms afforded. Their journey to the coalfields—as well as the niche they developed once they got there—came about through a convergence of their own background with conditions in Central Appalachia at the time they appeared on the scene. Since those conditions emerged from the region's preindustrial past, an understanding of that past is therefore critical to the story of Jewish life in the coalfields.

As recent scholars have pointed out, preindustrial Appalachian society was dynamic and complex, not the bucolic utopia that some earlier historians had depicted. Capitalism arrived in the eighteenth century with the earliest European settlers, mostly Scotch-Irish and German farm families who—not unlike later migrants to the region, including Jews—came in search of opportunities after experiencing economic upheaval in the old country and restricted prospects on America's eastern seaboard. The region also attracted some prosperous Anglo-American landowners eager to expand their holdings. As Wilma Dunaway put it, "settler Appalachia was *born capitalist*." The Native American inhabitants of the mountains were either forced out militarily or incorporated, through trade, into the Europeans' economic system. The colonists brought European patterns of land use: not only small-scale farming, but land speculation, absentee control over resources, and inequalities in landownership became early features of the economy. Outward-looking, export-oriented local elites established control over economic and social life. The rivers and turnpikes that traversed the mountains served as trade routes, and farmers large and small sold their surplus to outside markets. The region was neither isolated nor totally subsistence oriented.[65]

Yet this general outline does not tell the whole story because, as in Eastern Europe, development did not occur evenly throughout Appalachia. Geography and topography led to the evolution of three distinct subregions. The Blue Ridge and valley section, to the east and south, became connected to southern markets through settlement patterns and transportation routes. Along the western and northern edge of the mountains, the Ohio River and its tributaries linked the local population to northern markets, enabled the early growth of industry, and gave rise to town life in places such as Charleston and Wheeling. Between these two sections lay Central Appalachia, "a wildly beautiful 'interior'" of "peaks and ridges . . . rugged uplands . . . coves, hollows, and tablelands." In this most remote subregion, settlements appeared later, the population remained smaller, and travel was difficult. Problems in establishing adequate transportation systems caused the inhabitants to be less connected to outside markets than people in the other sections, although they were never completely isolated. With limited possibilities for importing goods or exporting agricultural surpluses, a noncommercial, subsistence-oriented economy developed, "centering on domestic production for domestic use." [66]

Just beyond the Central Appalachian plateau, the commerce, industry, and town development associated with the advance of capitalism proceeded throughout the antebellum period, aided by the construction of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad to the north and the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad to the south. In southwest Virginia, the contrast between valley and plateau counties grew quickly, according to historian Ken Noe. "By 1830 there were already significant differences . . . between counties with towns and those without, particularly in regard to economic diversification and commercialization." Town building occurred almost exclusively in the valley, while "many sections of the plateau remained unoccupied." As always, capitalist development proved a boon to some people but hurt many others, who found themselves

displaced by rising property values and land consolidation. As a result, some valley residents departed for the neighboring mountains of the plateau. "In such places, like Logan County, traditional noncapitalist ways survived, as if by spite, well after the Civil War," observes Noe.[67]

Whether or not the mountain counties harbored people with grievances against the emerging market system, the fact remains that without the necessary infrastructure, capitalist development there had stalled before the Civil War. Actually, within the small plateau population two orientations existed side by side. While some people valued a traditional agrarian way of life based on family, community, and patriarchy, others promoted economic growth and displayed a more individualistic approach. These two factions clashed in the political arena late into the nineteenth century. Local advocates of growth also faced opposition from political leaders of the non-Appalachian parts of their respective states, who prevented public funds from being spent on costly projects to benefit the mountain areas. This conflict contributed to the formation of the state of West Virginia, as development-oriented leaders in the western counties of Virginia took advantage of the Civil War crisis to secede from the Old Dominion. However, wartime turmoil and destruction, as well as the triumph of conservative political forces in the early 1870s, continued to forestall development of the mountains.[68]

Residents of the Central Appalachian plateau who desired to bring about economic progress would have to get help from somewhere, because they lacked the resources to transform the area by themselves. The subsistence-oriented economy stunted local accumulation of capital, leaving the region's leading families land-rich but cash-poor. The sizable financial investment required for railroad construction and industrial development would have to come from beyond the mountains, and entrepreneurial local elites "actively and eagerly encouraged capital investment from the outside," states Mary Beth Pudup. The plateau's "unspecialized family farming system"

also inhibited the growth of another essential ingredient in the evolution of more complex economic organization: towns. With the prevalence of home manufacturing and only a modest amount of staple crop production, there was little call for extra-household processing centers or specialization in trade—two key reasons for people and services to concentrate in commercial hubs. A handful of general merchants spread throughout the region could easily market the surpluses produced by this system while also importing the relatively small amount of goods that local farming communities could not produce for themselves. What town life did exist grew up around the county seats, centers of local government dominated by the wealthiest and oldest-established families whose roots were in the surrounding countryside.[69]

A look at the *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory* for 1882 illustrates the self-sufficiency of the area's small population and its lack of need for towns or services not directly related to farming. The directory listed virtually no specialized stores in the six counties that would soon make up the southern West Virginia coalfields.[70] The sole exceptions were two purveyors of liquor in the newly-developed coal shipping center of Quinnimont, in Fayette County, where the Chesapeake & Ohio railroad had recently made inroads (though development had not advanced very far as yet). While Quinnimont and its liquor establishments would prove a harbinger of things to come, most commercial activity centered around county seats or small settlements where grist mills had been established to serve local farmers. More people made a living as artisans or professionals than as traders: wagonmakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, lawyers, and physicians far outnumbered shopkeepers. Mercer County, where one of the two regional centers of the coalfields would soon develop, boasted the single bank in the entire six-county area in the county seat of Princeton, population 150. The directory listed just twelve general stores and one hotel in the county. Logan County had only thirteen general stores,

with three of those stores and both of the county's hotels based in Logan Court House, the county's sole town, population two hundred. In a later time, a prominent Logan Jewish merchant would marvel that as late as 1896, several years before the railroad reached his town, "Thomas Buchanan . . . of Logan County operated a mercantile establishment which sold everything from one-hundred-pound barrels of flour to axes." The least-developed county of all during the preindustrial period was McDowell, which had the smallest population in the state in 1880: a mere three thousand residents. The 1882 directory listed only ten general stores and three hotels in the county. Four of those stores and two of the hotels were located in the county seat of Peerysville, population sixty.[71]

Given Peerysville's tiny population, it is more than likely that its ability to sustain two hotels in 1882 was due to the increasing appearance of outsiders looking to use the courthouse to research land titles and record new transactions. In fact, interests representing the newly-incorporated Norfolk & Western railroad, as well as land speculators with advance knowledge of company's plans for the area, spent 1881 to 1882 frantically buying up land in what would shortly become the heart of the Pocahontas coalfield. By March of 1883 the railroad would ship its first load of coal east from Pocahontas, Virginia, and after the completion of the Flat Top Tunnel in 1888 allowed the company to push across the state line and into McDowell County, southern West Virginia would be forever transformed.[72]

Development Comes to the Mountains

By the 1880s, the time had arrived when the urgent need for coal to fuel the nation's rampant industrialization finally made profitable the expensive and arduous construction of railroads through the mountains. Geologists had long been aware of the high-quality bituminous

coal contained within the Central Appalachian plateau, and local promoters had attempted to attract outside capital since the end of the Civil War. The C&O railroad had opened the New River coalfield when it built its main line through Fayette County in 1873, but development had slowed largely because of the financial panic of 1873 and the national depression that followed. With the recovery of the 1880s, the coal industry began to take off and by 1885 coal surpassed wood as the nation's chief source of fuel. By 1910, coal "provided 75 percent of the energy used by the American economy," and a large portion of it came from Central Appalachia.[73]

Railroad building and coal land development took place concurrently and interdependently, transforming local conditions as they advanced deeper into the mountains. Rail companies planned their lines through the most promising coal territories, while local promoters and land speculators from both within and outside the region acquired huge tracts along proposed routes. These acquisitions often involved deceiving local farmers, who lacked awareness of the coming railroad or the value to industrializing America of the minerals that lay beneath their property. Speculators engaged in legal manipulation—laying claim to obscure, long-forgotten land titles granted to their colonial-era counterparts or using the infamous "broad form deed"—to wrest control away from owners unwilling to part with their land. Meanwhile, railroad executives such as the N&W's Frederick Kimball, in order to ensure profitable coal traffic along their newly-built lines, promoted the formation of large landholding companies which would purchase property from the speculators and lease it to coal mining operations. Thus land passed quickly from local families to enormous concerns based in Philadelphia, New York, and London.[74]

Although massive investments were required to open the coalfields, coal mining itself was more of a labor-intensive than a capital-intensive business—at least initially, before the onset of mechanization. The region's first coal companies were operated by individual entrepreneurs,

typically immigrants or sons of immigrants from the British Isles who had practical mining experience, drive and determination, but little capital. They arrived from overseas or from the Pennsylvania coalfields and began their companies on a limited budget, enlisting outside capital to bankroll start up and expansion (including the same investors involved in the land and railroad companies). Eventually the coal industry, too, became dominated by large, non-locally owned companies. Until then, early coal entrepreneurs became the "visible masters" of the region, given leave by the "real masters"—the holding companies whose property they leased—to develop the land as they saw fit. They promptly began to hire workers and build the mining infrastructure.[75]

The small local population and still-weak connections to outside markets meant that coal companies would have to recruit much of their labor from outside the region, transport workers to the area, and provide their new labor force with houses, stores, and other necessities of life. An entirely new civilization sprang up throughout Central Appalachia's coves and hollows. African Americans from the South and recently-arrived immigrants from Northern port cities joined local "native white" inhabitants in comprising the coal mining workforce. The region experienced a population explosion; in the southern West Virginia coalfields, for example, the population grew more than seven-fold between 1880 to 1920, from forty thousand to more than three hundred thousand. The vast majority of newcomers consisted of coal miners and their families, who moved into often-hastily constructed camps and towns built by coal companies.[76]

In the early 1920s, three-quarters of mining households lived in company-owned housing, and company towns remained a dominant feature of the landscape for decades. The quality of life they offered varied considerably depending on the company's management practices; at the upper end of the scale, a few "model towns" provided decent homes, modern schools, and other amenities while at the lower end were numerous barely-habitable camps with flimsy structures

and unsanitary conditions. Most were somewhere in between; however, all company towns shared in at least two basic features. First, they quickly formed into stratified societies. Class distinctions became evident in the layout of the towns: coal company officials typically lived along "Silk Stocking Rows" while coal miners, usually segregated by race and often also by ethnicity, were relegated to less desirable locations. Second, and above all, the company towns existed for the sole purpose of extracting coal.[77]

Company-owned towns have received a great deal of attention in literature on the Central Appalachian coalfields. But they were not the only new form of social organization to arise as a result of industrialization. The change from an economy based on agriculture to one based on extractive industry generated "new demands for new kinds of centralized, specialized economic activities" that could be met neither by the single-minded company towns nor by the few pre-existing villages and merchants. Thus the opening of the coalfields offered opportunity to entrepreneurial newcomers, who joined local merchants and service providers in the small yet bustling independent towns that emerged to service the coal economy and the region's booming population. Jewish immigrants, bringing their experience in trade and their retail networks with them, became a significant component of the new merchant class in many of these new commercial hubs. Along with the other townspeople, they contributed to the make-up of a small coalfield middle class that has rarely been examined by historians.[78]

Although not as ubiquitous as company towns, independent towns played an important role as centers of commerce and social life in the coalfields. Some grew out of once-sleepy county seats, others out of the tiny rural settlements that dotted the landscape. Still others appeared at strategic rail locations where no settlement had existed before. These were originally developed

by enterprising coal land speculators or by the railroad and land companies, who saw the need for local rail hubs which would provide ancillary services to the coal economy. They reserved small portions of their holdings for this purpose, selling these sites to real estate developers or forming their own real estate companies to lay out streets, subdivide the land, and sell off plots. Some independent towns rose and fell as raw boomtowns. Others, particularly those that started out as (or soon became) county seats, developed into commercial centers. Yet despite their independence from direct coal company control, all the towns were nevertheless completely dependent on the coal industry for their economic well-being—a circumstance that sometimes worked to their advantage, but often to their detriment.[79]

The particular form that coalfield development took created lasting problems for Central Appalachia and its people. The predicament is summed up by Jerry Bruce Thomas: "The concentration in landholding . . . meant, in effect, that the region's future was mortgaged to absentee owners whose sole interest was in seeing the timber and mineral wealth of the land removed." Anxious to recoup—and profit from—their massive investment in the region's infrastructure, railroad and land companies encouraged their coal mining subsidiaries to engage in an intensive effort to exploit the land. The "near-monopolistic pattern of land ownership" prevented other forms of development, stunting the diversification needed for a healthy economic system. Meanwhile, to succeed in a notoriously unstable national coal market and in fierce competition with other coal mining regions, coal companies fixed on controlling their labor force as the key to keeping costs low, underselling competitors, and maintaining profits. This strategy led to a rabidly anti-union stance and a determination to gain complete political domination of the region. Although they largely achieved the hegemony they sought, their methods led to the violent labor conflicts that periodically wracked the coalfields.[80]

With a lack of other industries and a low wage workforce both hindering the growth of local markets, the region's fortunes remained tied to the vagaries of the national coal market. During the boom times, the coalfields bustled with activity; during the busts, conditions became dire. Yet in either case, most of the profits flowed out of the region, as Ron Eller puts it, "into the pockets of outland capitalists and into the expansion of the larger industrial order itself." [81]

The movement of capital from "international finance centers" to Central Appalachia, Randall Lawrence points out, "was part of a larger movement of capital into resource-rich agricultural regions around the world." Financiers in the late nineteenth century also invested in railroads, mines, and plantations in Africa, Asia, South America—and Eastern Europe. To put Appalachian development in perspective, some recent scholars have used the framework of world systems theory. This theory posits an ever-expanding, ever-shifting capitalist dynamic which began in sixteenth century northern and western Europe and has since spread throughout the world, incorporating other geographical zones into a capitalist world system through its voracious search for raw materials, cheap labor, new markets, and investment opportunities. Nations in the capitalist "core" vie for hegemonic status and their competition provides the impetus for constant expansion. The newly-incorporated territories become either "peripheries," where "raw materials are extracted to support the more developed spheres within the system," or "semi-peripheries," which are "highly developed commercial staging areas for capital and trade." These new geographical zones provide benefits to the core nations, but also sometimes develop to the point where they can compete for core status themselves. Historian Wilma Dunaway uses quantitative analysis of Appalachia's landownership, investment, and demographic patterns to argue that the entire region became incorporated as a periphery during the colonial era. However, the uneven nature of development in the region suggests that only in the late nineteenth century

did the Central Appalachian plateau become fully drawn into an evolving world capitalist system as a periphery providing raw materials to the core—a status it has never managed to transcend.[82]

World systems theory provides an intriguing basis for comparison of Central Appalachia and Eastern Europe: both were undergoing incorporation into the capitalist system at roughly the same time. In both regions, the transition occurred unevenly and had its roots in an earlier period. And for both, the process reached its height in the late nineteenth century, as shown by the movement of people, consolidation of land and enterprise, urbanization, and industrialization that each experienced at that time. As historian John Bodnar points out, immigrants to America during the era came from many backgrounds and responded to their surroundings in many ways. What they all shared was the need to devise strategies to provide for their families when faced with "the common experience of confronting capitalism" on both sides of the Atlantic.[83] The migration of some Eastern Europeans—Jews and non-Jews—to Central Appalachia was just one manifestation of the process. It is no coincidence that Eastern Europeans (along with Italians) made up the bulk of the region's immigrant workforce. In fact, future Central Appalachian miners and Jewish shopkeepers had much in common: both left an industrializing Europe only to find their place in an industrializing Appalachia.

Notes to Chapter 1

---

[1] "Weinstein Brothers," *Middlesborough News*, March 21, 1903, 1; Hirsh Abramovitch, "Rural Jewish Occupations in Lithuania," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* (1947-1948): 205-221.

[2] Abraham I. Shinedling and Manuel Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community* (Beckley, W.Va.: Biggs-Johnston-Withrow, 1955), 41 (quote); Manuel Pickus, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 18 May, 1998; I.M. Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* 72 (September, 1907): 487-583; Joseph P. Schultz, "The 'Ze'enah U'Re'enah': Torah for the Folk," *Judaism* 36 (Winter, 1987): 84-96.

[3] "Weinstein Brothers," 1; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 81-82.

[4] Oscar Handlin's groundbreaking work *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951) insisted on the centrality of immigration to the American experience and made it a key part of American historiography. While Handlin did not ignore the immigrants' old country roots, he focused on the traumas of life in America and asserted that immigrants made a sharp break with their past. *The Uprooted* was the standard in the field until recent decades. Scholars now tend to stress the continuities between immigrants' old country and new world experience. John Bodnar synthesized the new paradigm in *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

[5] Nachum Gross, ed., *Economic History of the Jews* (New York: Schocken, 1975); Bernard Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973); Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism: Poland and its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); "Hungary," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8 (New York: MacMillan Company, 1971), 1088-1098; "Rumania," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 14, 386-415.

[6] Marc Zborowski and Elisabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), 68. See also Isaac Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917* (Jerusalem: Posner & Sons, 1981); Isaac Bashevis Singer, *In My Father's Court* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1962); Sholom Aleichem, *Old Country Tales* (New York: Paperback Library Edition, 1969) on the institutions, internal dynamics, and everyday preoccupations of Jewish life.

[7] Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*, 193; Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia.*

[8] For a good introduction to the middleman minority concept, see Walter P. Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991). Quote is from Zenner, xii.

[9] Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*; Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, eds., *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

This topic has proved quite controversial. A major point of contention goes back to the cultural versus economic/ structural debate which has long raged in discussions about ethnicity. In other words, is there

something in the culture of these groups that predisposes them to take on the middleman role, or does it develop out of the socioeconomic context in which they find themselves (or does the answer lie in a complex mixture of the two)? The discussion has been clouded by ideology; critics of capitalism have tended to view middleman minorities in a negative light, stressing their complicity in the exploitation of the masses even to the point of justifying attacks against them. See for example Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Middleman Minorities," *American Sociological Review* 38 (October, 1973): 583-594. Conversely, scholars who point to the positive role played by such minorities in helping societies advance beyond feudalism often downplay the genuine abuses of capitalism; they focus on a reactionary "fear of change" as the reason for the backlash against middleman minorities, rather than the very real dislocations that do occur (which is not to say that blaming minorities is an appropriate response).

As a result of the potentially inflammatory nature of the discussion (see Chirot and Reid, *Essential Outsiders*, 5), some find the concept of the middleman minority something to be avoided. However, I think it provides a valuable international perspective from which to view the history of European Jews, and by extension amplifies the background of their American descendants. On debates surrounding middleman minority theory, see Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*, and three essays in the Chirot and Reid volume: Daniel Chirot, "Conflicting Identities and the Dangers of Communalism," 3-32; Anthony Reid, "Entrepreneurial Minorities, Nationalism, and the State," 33-71; Hillel Kieval, "Middleman Minorities and Blood," 208-233.

[10] Gershon David Hundert, "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland," in *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from* Polin, ed. Antony Polonsky (Washington, D.C.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 20-23; Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland.*

[11] Jack Kugelmass, "Native Aliens: The Jews of Poland as a Middleman Minority" (Ph.D. diss., New School for Social Research, 1980), 39-40; Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*, 67; Aleksander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), esp. 79-83.

[12] Kieval, "Middleman Minorities and Blood," 215; Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism*, 152. On the factors that lead to economic "scapegoating" of Jews, see also Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*; Steven Beller, "'Pride and Prejudice' or 'Sense and Sensibility?' How Reasonable Was Anti-Semitism in Vienna, 1880-1939," in Chirot and Reid, eds., *Essential Outsiders*, 99-123.

[13] William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Raphael Mahler, "The Economic Background of Jewish Emigration from Galicia to the United States," in *East European Jews in Two Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Annual,* ed. Deborah Dash Moore (Evanston, Ill.: YIVO and Northwestern University Press, 1990), 125-137.

[14] Salo W. Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1976); John Doyle Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772-1825* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).

[15] At first, limiting Jews to the Pale did not constitute a particularly onerous constraint. Russia was still a feudal society where political and civil rights did not exist. Jews were one of many castes, each subject to certain restrictions and each granted certain privileges. Later in the nineteenth century, after the liberation of the serfs and the gradual (though never completed) extension of rights to the general population, Jews continued to suffer legal liabilities and in fact such discriminatory laws increased, thus

officially designating them as an inferior group. Their confinement in the Pale eventually had grave economic consequences. Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews.*

At the time of the 1897 Russian Census, Jews made up 9 to 15 percent of the population in the five main regions of the Pale: Poland, Lithuania, White Russia, Southwestern Russia (Ukraine), and Southern (New) Russia. Their percentage of the population was much higher in the region's cities, and correspondingly lower in rural areas. The Pale was home to almost five million Jews, accounting for 98 percent of the Empire's Jewish population. Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," 491, 521.

[16] Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983); Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*; Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," in *Perspectives in American History* 9, ed. D. Fleming and B. Bailyn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 35-124.

[17] Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Mahler, "The Economic Background of Jewish Emigration from Galicia to the United States"; Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States"; Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia." Rubinow's detailed look at the economy of the Pale is based on an 1898 investigation by the St. Petersburg-based Jewish Colonization Society, which published a two-volume report in 1905 entitled "Sbornik Materialov ob Economicheskom Polozhenii Evreev v Rossii" ("Collection of Materials in Regard to the Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia").

According to Raeff, the Russian Empire's policy of promoting economic modernization without allowing the general population the freedoms necessary to mitigate its harsh effects or fully benefit from its new opportunities contributed greatly to the empire's economic and social crisis. See also Peter Waldron, *The End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1917* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

[18] In 1897, in addition to commercial and manufacturing occupations, 19 percent of the Jewish workforce worked in "personal service," which included the hotel, restaurant, and saloon industries. Five percent were professionals, 3 percent worked in transportation, and 3 percent followed agricultural pursuits. Statistics are from Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," 77, and Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," 500. See also Mahler, "The Economic Background of Jewish Emigration from Galicia to the United States"; Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*.

On the social transformation of East European Jewry, see for example Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Samuel Kassow, "Communal and Social Change in the Polish Shtetl," in *Jewish Settlement and Community in the Modern Western World*, ed. R. Dotterer, D. Dash Moore, S.M. Cohen (Selinsgrove, Penn.: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 56-92; Abraham Ain, "Swislocz: Portrait of a Jewish Community in Eastern Europe," in *East European Jews in Two Worlds*, 22-50.

[19] Abramovitch, "Rural Jewish Occupations in Lithuania"; Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia"; Kassow, "Communal and Social Change in the Polish Shtetl."

[20] Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Stephen M. Berk, *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope: Russian Jewry and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985); John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a catalogue of anti-Jewish legislation during the era, see Bernard K. Johnpoll, "Why They Left: Russian-Jewish Mass Migration and the Repressive Laws, 1881-1917," *American Jewish Archives* 47 (Spring-Summer 1995): 17-54. On the economic impact of pogroms and government policies see U.S. Immigration Commission, *Emigration Conditions in Europe, Reports of the Immigration Commission, Volume 12* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911), 272-280; Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States"; Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia"; Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*. On the psychological impact of pogroms, see especially Berk and Baron.

[21] Berk, *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope*; Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*; Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*; Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[22] Mark Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration since 1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America), 28; Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*. On Europe's late nineteenth to early twentieth century mass migration movements see Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). On the emigration of Jews from the German lands, see Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Migration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994).

[23] Mahler, "The Economic Background of Jewish Emigration from Galicia to the United States," 125; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 351-352 (statistics on Austria-Hungary), 361, 272 (quotes); *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 8, "Hungary," 1088-1098. See Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," and Nugent, *Crossings*, for a comparative analysis of Jewish and non-Jewish emigration from Europe.

According to Kuznets (39), the Russian Empire supplied around 76 percent of Jewish immigrants to America between 1881 and 1914 while Austria-Hungary supplied 19 percent, though they contained around 69 percent and 27 percent, respectively, of Eastern Europe's Jewish population (the remainder was Rumanian) (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13, "Population," 889-892). An average of 1.36 percent of the Russian Empire's Jewish population migrated to America each year between 1899 and 1914, compared to annual immigration rates of .4 to .5 percent for the Empire's Poles, Lithuanians, Finns, and Germans. Almost 22 percent of the Jewish population emigrated from Russia during that period, compared to between 6 and 8 percent of the other ethnic groups (Kuznets, 51). It must be noted that *migration* rates for non-Jews in the Russian Empire were considerably higher than their *emigration* rates; they were more likely than Jews to relocate to other parts of the empire. Russian Jews migrated to America at a higher rate than any other European group except the Irish.

[24] Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," 83-85; Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," 492 ("emigration fever"); Berk, *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope*, 121. On the draft as impetus for emigration among both Jews and non-Jews in Russian Poland, see Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*, 67, and Annual Reports of the Lomza Provincial Governor, 1907-1912, file no. 6513, Chancellory of the Warsaw Governor-General Collection (Kancelaria General-Gubernatora Warszawskiego), Main Archive of Old Documents (Archiwum Glówne Akt Dawnych), Warsaw, Poland (translation courtesy of Robert Blobaum).

[25] Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsar and Soviets*; Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*; Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917*; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1976); Lloyd P. Gartner, "Jewish Migrants En Route from Europe to North America," 25-43, and Arthur A. Goren, "Traditional Institutions Transplanted," 62-78, in *The Jews of North America*, ed. Moses Rischin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

[26] Carole Malkin, ed. *The Journeys of David Toback As Retold by His Granddaughter* (New York: Schocken, 1988), 3; David Kasdan, "The History and Memoirs of My Life" (Biographies File, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati); Michael Kline, "Every Tree, Every Bush, Every Rock: An Interview with Hyman Weiner, Charleston Tailor," *Goldenseal* 4 (April-September 1978): 31-38; Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 25.

[27] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 23-26.

[28] Singer, *In My Father's Court*; Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*; Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917*.

[29] Sources used to determine the European origins of coalfield Jews include: U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, 1920, Bell and Harlan Counties, Kentucky; Tazewell and Wise Counties, Virginia; Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Raleigh Counties, West Virginia. Also, Declaration of Intention and Petition for Naturalization books in the county courthouses of the five West Virginia counties. Also, Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Rose Marino, *Welch and Its People* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Press, 1985); Bell County Historical Society, *Bell County, Kentucky, History* (Paducah: Turner Publishing Co., 1994). Also, interviews with descendants of Jewish immigrants revealed the European roots of some coalfield Jews.

In the following discussion of East European towns, "small town" refers to towns with a population of less than five thousand (including towns and villages so small that population figures were not listed in standard sources). "Medium-sized" describes a population of five to ten thousand; "city" refers to incorporated localities with populations above ten thousand. For population figures and descriptions of the towns, the following sources were consulted: *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1971); Chester Cohen, *Shtetl Finder Gazetteer: Jewish Communities in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1989); Nancy Schoenburg and Stuart Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991); *Rand-McNally Indexed Atlas of the World, Volume 2: Foreign Countries* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1905).

Several difficulties confront the researcher hunting for details regarding immigrant origins. Courthouse naturalization books contain information given by often-uneducated immigrants to local clerks who were unfamiliar with Eastern European geography, not to mention spelling. Moreover, many Eastern European towns have multiple spellings, based on the different languages used in their particular region. Quite often, they also have similar, or even identical, spellings to other towns in Eastern Europe. While these problems cannot be completely overcome, they can be compensated for by cross-checking and using multiple sources to reconstruct individual origins, in order to attain as accurate a result as possible.

[30] "Bolekhov," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 4, 1185; Abraham Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963), 1103.

[31] Marilou S. Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee" (NP: 1963), 7; Isadore Scott, phone interview with author, 14 December, 1997.

[32] Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," 494.

[33] See note 29 above for sources. This discussion is based on data collected about 710 Eastern-European-born Jews living in the coalfields between 1880 and 1930. While the sources provided information on the former state citizenship of almost all of these people (i.e., Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, Rumania, Germany, etc.), more precise information was not available for most. Around half could be identified only as originating in the Russian Empire, while the regional origins of the other half could be more closely ascertained (i.e., Lithuania, White Russia, Hungary, Russian Poland, Galicia, etc.). Of those people, the actual birthplaces of 122 could be determined with a fair degree of certainty.

[34] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); Ellen Eisenberg, "Argentine and American Jewry: A Case for Contrasting Immigrant Origins," *American Jewish Archives* 47 (Spring-Summer, 1995): 1-16.

[35] Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," 39; Rubinow, "Economic Condition of Russian Jews," 495 (quote); Abramovitch, "Rural Jewish Occupations in Lithuania."

[36] This discussion is based on the 456 East European Jewish immigrants to the coalfields whose date of immigration was available (see note 29 for sources). Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," 39, 47, 119.

[37] Gertrude Dubrovsky, "Book Review: *Jewish Farmers in the Catskills*, by Abraham D. Lavender and Clarence B. Steinberg," *American Jewish Archives* 48, no. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1996): 97-102. U.S. census statistics from 1890 suggest that at that time, up to two-thirds of Russian Jewish immigrants may have settled outside of the northeast, a far higher percentage than after the turn of the century. However the numbers are uncertain and the implications unclear, says Dubrovsky. "It is this movement, the out-migration of Jews from the cities, that has not been studied. . . . Where they went and what they did for how long are difficult questions to answer" (97-98).

[38] Bodnar, *The Transplanted*; Nugent, *Crossings*. For an account of how chain migration influenced the early European-American settlement of Appalachia, see Ralph Mann, "Mountain Settlement: Appalachian and National Modes of Migration," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 2 (Fall 1996): 337-345.

[39] Abraham I. Shinedling, "Memoir of Bernard Silverman" (Biographies File, American Jewish Archives); Sidney Fink, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 12 October 1996; "Col. Jos. M. Lopinsky," *McDowell Recorder*, December 12, 1913; various interviews.

[40] Pickus, interview with author; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 257; Annual Reports of the Lomza Provincial Governor, 1907-1912; Pamela S. Nadell, "The Journey to America by Steam: The Jews of Eastern Europe in Transition," *American Jewish History* 71 (1981-1982): 269-284; Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety*, 52.

[41] U.S. Immigration Commission, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 357-360; Nadell, "The Journey to America by Steam," 269 (quote); Zosa Szajkowski, "Sufferings of Jewish Emigrants to America in Transit Through Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* (Winter/Spring 1977): 105-116; Wischnitzer, *To*

Dwell in Safety. Of the eighty-two coalfield Jews whose ports of embarkation were ascertained from naturalization records, twenty-five arrived from Bremen, twenty-one from Hamburg, ten from Libau, six each from Antwerp and Liverpool, and the rest from various other ports.

[42] Pickus, interview with author; Nadell, "The Journey to America by Steam."

[43] Nugent, *Crossings,* 36.

[44] Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States," 96, 98; Nugent, *Crossings*, 94, 160; Jonathan Sarna, "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914," *American Jewish History* 71 (March 1981): 259-269; Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993). Return migration rates refer to the ratio of outgoing to incoming migrants. From 1908 to 1923, return migration rates ranged from around 90 percent for Serbs to 60 percent for southern Italians to 5 percent for Jews. The Irish had the second lowest return migration rate during that period, 11 percent (Wyman, 11).

[45] U.S. Manuscript Census, Wise County, Virginia, 1900, 1910; Sniderman, *Diamond in the Rough*, 15.

[46] Caroline Golab, *Immigrant Destinations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977); Bodnar, *The Transplanted*; Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press).

[47] Bodnar, *The Transplanted*; Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States"; Kessner, *The Golden Door*; Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[48] Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 1-35. Characterizing all Jews who came to America between 1820 and 1880 as "German" is somewhat misleading. Although the majority arrived from the German states, others came from the French Alsace, Hapsburg-controlled Bohemia and Moravia, and Prussian Poland.

[49] Lee Friedman, *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1943), 19 (first quote); Priscilla Fishman, ed., *The Jews of the United States* (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1973), 19 (second quote); Barkai, *Branching Out*; Diner, *A Time for Gathering*.

[50] Sorin, *A Time for Building*; Diner, *A Time for Gathering*; Zosa Szajkowski, "The Attitude of American Jews to East European Jewish Immigration, 1881-1893," *Papers of the American Jewish Historical Society* 40 (March, 1951): 222-232. As part of an effort to "Americanize" their fellow Jews, American Jews created organizations to encourage East European immigrants to disperse throughout the country. The most prominent was the Industrial Removal Office, which helped some seventy-five thousand East European Jewish immigrants settle in small cities and towns throughout the U.S. and Canada between 1901 and 1917. The IRO sent a handful of immigrants to the larger towns and cities of the Appalachian region, such as Huntington and Charleston, West Virginia, but had no impact on the coalfields.

[51] Kessner, *The Golden Door*, 68, 111. On the concept of *takhlis*, see Moses Kligsberg, "Jewish Immigrants in Business: A Sociological Study," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 56 (March 1967): 283-318 (quote, 288). Morawska also discusses this concept in *Insecure Prosperity*, 23-26.

[52] Sorin, *A Time for Building*, 74-78; Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 139, 163.

[53] Howe, *World of Our Fathers* 82, 80; Kessner, *The Golden Door*; Sorin, *A Time for Building*.

[54] Sorin, *A Time for Building*; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955); Ida Cohen Selevan, "Jewish Wage Earners in Pittsburgh, 1890-1930," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 65 (March, 1976): 272-285 (quote, 272).

Since East European Jewish immigrants could rely on ethnic networks for employment, discrimination did not pose a serious threat to their economic well-being. Second generation Jews felt its effects more strongly, as they attempted to leave their ethnic enclaves and find work in the professional, corporate, and academic worlds. See John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 96-172; Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[55] Sorin, *A Time for Building*; Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: Dial, 1976); Judith E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985); Howe, *World of Our Fathers*; Daniel Soyer, "Between Two Worlds: The Jewish *Landsmanshaftn* and Immigrant Identity," *American Jewish History* 76 (September 1986): 5-24; Robert Rockaway, *But—He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (New York, 1995).

[56] Sorin, *A Time for Building*; Howe, *World of Our Fathers*. Howe states: "*Yiddishkeit* refers to that phase of Jewish history during the past two centuries which is marked by the prevalence of Yiddish as the language of the East European Jews and by the growth among them of a culture resting mainly on that language. The culture of *Yiddishkeit* is no longer strictly that of traditional Orthodoxy, yet it retains strong ties to the religious past. It takes on an increasingly secular character yet is by no means confined to the secularist. . . . It refers to a way of life, a shared experience, which goes beyond opinion or ideology" (16).

[57] Joel Perlmann, "Beyond New York: The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I. and Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-1915," *American Jewish History* 72 (March 1983): 369-394.

[58] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 32, 36-37; Perlmann, "Beyond New York"; Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262; Hal Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon': Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865-1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring, 1995): 83-104.

[59] Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South"; Perlmann, "Beyond New York"; Marc Raphael, "Beyond New York," in *Jews of the American West*, ed. Moses Rischin and John Livingston (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991): 52-65. As Raphael puts it, "Everywhere in this country . . . Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants created communities" (55).

Southern and Western Jewish historians have taken the lead in recounting the experience of smaller and non-metropolitan East European Jewish communities in America. See for example Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978); Norton Stern, "The Major Role of Polish Jews in the Pioneer West," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* (July 1976, 326-344); Louis Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation': Jewish Religious Life in a Rural Southern Town, 1900-1940," in *Cultural Perspectives on the American South, Vol. 5,* ed. C.R. Wilson (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1991); Leonard Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81; Rothman, "Same Horse, New Wagon."

[60] "Weinstein Brothers"; "Col. Jos. M. Lopinsky"; Jean Abrams Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October, 1996; Edward Eiland, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Logan, W.Va., 28 May, 1996; Sam and Harvey Weiner, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 8 November, 1996; Scott interview; "Sam Polan Goes to School," *McDowell Recorder*, November 7, 1913, 1.

[61] Fink interview.

[62] Naturalization records, census data, and interviews were used to pinpoint the previous American homes of coalfield Jews and the length of time spent in those locales. Naturalization records revealed debarkation points. Of one hundred records examined, sixty-five people arrived at the port of New York and twenty-five arrived at the port of Baltimore. Sam and Harvey Weiner interview; Manuel Pickus, interview with Maryanne Reed, Charleston, W.Va., 8 August, 1996; Bernard Gottlieb, interview with author, Clarksburg, W.Va., 5 November, 1996; Fink interview; Eiland interview.

[63] Kligsberg, "Jewish Immigrants in Business," 293.

[64] Scott interview.

[65] Robert Mitchell, ed., *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, & Development in the Preindustrial Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991); Wilma Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 16; Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[66] Randall G. Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis: Industrializing Society on the Central Appalachian Plateau, 1860-1913" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983); Kenneth W. Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Quotes are from John Alexander Williams, "Class, Section, and Culture in Nineteenth Century West Virginia Politics (210-232, quote 213) and Mary Beth Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky" (270-296, quote 277), both in Pudup, Billings, and Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making*.

[67] Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*; Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad*, 54, 13, 51.

[68] Pudup, Billings, and Waller, eds., *Appalachia in the Making*; Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad*; Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*.

[69] Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*; Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis." For a composite picture of eastern Kentucky's local elite, see three articles by Mary Beth Pudup: "Social Class and Economic Development in Southeast Kentucky, 1820-1880," in Mitchell, ed., *Appalachian Frontiers*, 235-260 (first quote, 260), "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky" (second quote, 277), and "The Boundaries of Class in Preindustrial Appalachia," *Journal of Historical Geography* 15, no. 2 (1989): 139-162, which examines local elites in Harlan, Floyd, and Perry Counties, Kentucky.

[70] The six counties were: Fayette, Raleigh, Mercer, McDowell, Wyoming, and Logan. In 1895 Mingo County would be formed from part of Logan. *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1882-1883* (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Company).

[71] *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1882-1883*; U.S. Census Bureau, *State Compendium: West Virginia* (Washington: GPO, 1925); Rudolph Eiland, "The Retail Merchant," in *Centennial Program, City of Logan, West Virginia, 1852-1952* (Logan: Logan Centennial Association, 1952), 98.

[72] Joseph T. Lambie, *From Mine to Market* (New York: New York University Press, 1954).

[73] Jerry Bruce Thomas, "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and its Effect on Area Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1971), 5-6 (quote); Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*. Another reason for the delay in the development of coal lands in C&O territory was that C&O magnate Collis P. Huntington was focused on his national vision of building a transcontinental railroad, rather than on exploiting local opportunities. In contrast, N&W chairman Frederick Kimball saw coal traffic as a principal source of income for his railroad, and did all he could to encourage the development of coal lands along the N&W main line. Their different attitudes played a large role in how the New River and Pocahontas fields developed. See Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis," 37-42.

[74] Thomas, "Coal Country"; Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis"; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*; Kincaid Herr, *The Louisville & Nashville Railroad* (Louisville: L&N Railroad, 1964). Under the broad form deed, farmers sold the mineral rights to their land but ostensibly kept their surface rights to live on and farm their properties. However, the deed authorized coal companies to remove the coal "by whatever means necessary," enabling them to gain control over the surface as well. See Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 55. His chapter "A Magnificent Field for Capitalists" still offers the best description of how local promoters and outside capitalists transformed land ownership in Appalachia. See also Lambie, 39, on the low prices paid to farmers by speculators and the enormous profits they reaped.

[75] Thomas, "Coal Country," 83; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Charles Kenneth Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979).

[76] Population figures include the counties of Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh and Wyoming. U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population* (Washington: GPO), 1880, 1920 censuses.

[77] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns"; David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Crandall A. Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Mack Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field of Southern West Virginia, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972); Ronald L. Lewis, "Appalachian Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Coal, Culture, and Social Change in West Virginia," *Urban Studies* 30, no. 2 (1993): 299-308; *Report of the United States Coal Commission, Part III* (Washington: GPO 1925), population statistics, 1467.

[78] Mary Beth Pudup is one scholar who has devoted attention to the formation of towns as well as the development of the region's middle class. In "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky" she follows town life in eastern Kentucky from the preindustrial era through the coming of railroads and the coal industry (quote, 286). In *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*, Ron Lewis provides a chapter on town formation, but his work focuses on West Virginia counties where coal was not present in large quantities and timber was the dominant industry.

[79] In some cases, the local coal company owned one section of town and the other section was independent. Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983); *When the Trains Came to Norton, Wise County* (Norton, Va.: *Coalfield Progress*, 1941); Houston Kermit Hunter, "The Story of McDowell County," *West Virginia Review* 17, no. 7 (April, 1940): 165-169; Walter R. Thurmond, "The Town of Thurmond, 1884-1961" (West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.).; "Most Stupendous Land Deal Ever Pulled Off in Keystone," *McDowell Times*, January 12, 1917; *Williamson, West Virginia: Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field* (Williamson, W.Va.: Williamson Chamber of Commerce, 1931).

[80] Thomas, "Coal Country," 82, 275. On the impact of the national coal market on the region's economy, see Richard M. Simon, "The Development of Underdevelopment: The Coal Industry and its Effect on the West Virginia Economy, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1978). On the coal industry's efforts to maintain political and social control of the coalfields see for example Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*; John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On? The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978). For an early account, see Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia: A Story of Industrial Conflict in the Coal Mines* (New York: Arno Press, 1921).

[81] Simon, "The Development of Underdevelopment"; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 242.

[82] Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis," 1; Dunaway, *The First American Frontier*. Explanations of peripheries and semi-peripheries are from Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*, 50.

[83] Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, xvi.

Chapter 2

The Lay of the Land: Historical Geography of Jewish Settlement in the Coalfields

Jacob Epstein probably never set foot in the southern coalfields, yet he may have been the single individual most responsible for the creation of Jewish communities there. A Lithuanian Jew who arrived in America in 1879 at age fifteen, Epstein started out peddling in Pennsylvania, northern West Virginia, and western Maryland. In 1881 he settled in Baltimore where he proceeded to build one of the city's largest wholesale firms, the Baltimore Bargain House. According to his biographer, "From the outset Jacob Epstein set out to do a jobbing business with the peddlers who played such an important part in those days in bringing needed wares, and entertaining stories, to rural housewives. . . . Trusting the peddlers, he was willing to sell to a number of them on credit, which was unobtainable from most of the larger wholesale houses. As a result, his business prospered from the very beginning."[1]

But Epstein did not rely only on farm women for a customer base. He made sure to keep up with regional developments, and when other young Jewish immigrants came to the Baltimore Bargain House looking for a start in business, he outfitted them with goods and pointed many of them in the direction of the lumber and coal settlements which had begun to sprout up along the newly-built rail lines to the west and south of Baltimore. Epstein apparently took somewhat of a paternal interest in his peddlers. Not only did he extend them goods on credit—which they needed since they had no cash—he also offered them advice on all manner of topics (to maintain their health on the road, he urged, "eat prunes"). The solid relationship that developed between the Baltimore Bargain House and its retailer clients lasted for decades, as peddlers became small shopkeepers and successful merchants in small towns in Central Appalachia and throughout the

South. Their business helped the Baltimore Bargain House become "one of the four largest wholesale houses in the United States" by 1900 (according to the firm's literature), and enabled Epstein to become one of Baltimore's most prominent philanthropists, a major supporter of such institutions as Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore Museum of Art.[2]

Epstein sent his peddlers out on the very same rail lines that were just beginning to haul the treasures of the mountains off to distant markets. This two-way traffic has not received much exploration in historical accounts of Central Appalachia, which focus on the exporting of resources from the region but rarely on the importing of goods into it. Yet as the agricultural economy gave way to an industrial economy, the population became less self-sufficient, requiring outside imports to furnish the necessities—not to mention the comforts—of life. As Ronald L. Lewis notes, industrialization brought the "commercialization of the countryside," with a "wage earning population now dependent on others to produce their subsistence." Thus a ready and expanding retail market was created, comprised of a growing population of workers and their families.[3]

But who were the people who responded to this entrepreneurial opportunity, and how did they find their way to it? What impact did their presence have on the region? Without an analysis of this group, discussions of coalfield development are somewhat unbalanced—not only because the merchant (or middle) class has been left out of most accounts of life in the region, but also because the opening of the coalfields to outside markets involved two distinct processes. The exporting may have been carried out by the coal industry, but, with the notable exception of company stores, the importing was carried out by an entirely different set of people: people who had their own commercial networks and were linked to different kinds of markets. Certainly not all—or even most—merchants in the coalfields were Jewish. But Jews did emerge as a

significant minority in many Central Appalachian towns. In their role as traders, they played an important part in bringing the products of American consumer culture into the mountains and tying the region to national markets. Their story adds to a more complete depiction of the dynamics of coalfield development.[4]

A Peddler's Tale

It was their link to the Baltimore Bargain House that brought many of the early Jewish entrepreneurs to the coalfields. Some descendants later recalled that the wholesaler directed their fathers and grandfathers to the region even as the railroads were under construction. As one man put it, the peddlers would disembark "where the railroad ended" and immediately begin to trudge up the hillsides with their packs. According to his son, Wolf Bank "chose to pick up some things from the Baltimore Bargain House and start peddling" a few years after his arrival in the U.S. from his native Lithuania. Wolf's brother Harry did the same, and the two arrived in McDowell County, West Virginia, by the mid-1890s, shortly after the Norfolk & Western Railroad pushed through the area. Fellow Lithuanian-Jewish peddler Jacob Shore entered the county around the same time, also with a pack filled with Baltimore Bargain House goods. Others who had peddled the wholesaler's products in surrounding territories learned about opportunities in the southern coalfields through their connection with the firm. Having saved up some money, they immediately opened stores upon arriving in the region. Jacob Berman peddled in Maryland, and around 1902, "when he had a little capital ahead, then he went to Keystone [West Virginia] and opened up his little clothing store," recalled his son. After peddling in the northern part of the state, the Pickus brothers, Louis and Nathan, established stores in Beckley in 1911 just as the town was beginning to emerge as a southern West Virginia coalfield center.[5]

Jake Shore roamed through a pretty broad territory: although he peddled and soon settled in McDowell County, according to family legend he developed a friendship with a particularly notable customer in neighboring Logan (later Mingo) County: "Devil Anse" Hatfield. Whenever he passed through the area he stayed at the home of the famed Hatfield patriarch, who warned his neighbors, "don't bother Uncle Jake, he's all right." This stamp of approval probably allowed Shore to feel more secure than most peddlers. The job involved considerable risk, as peddlers traveled alone and were known to carry cash. Stories about the robbery and/or murder of foreign peddlers abounded in the coalfields. Though the tales were no doubt exaggerated in order to play up the area's rough reputation, historical accounts of peddlers from other times and places confirm the dangers of the job. Hatfield's use of the term "uncle," however, sheds some doubt on the legend's veracity, since it conforms more to stereotypes of peddlers—as stooped, frail old men—than to reality. Stooped the coalfield peddlers may well have been, carrying one-hundred-pound packs up steep mountainsides. But most were quite youthful. They saw peddling as a starting point, a necessary step on the way to their goal of opening their own store. Jake Shore's peddling days occurred in his twenties; Devil Anse was some thirty years older than he.[6]

On the other hand, Hatfield's penchant for consumer goods, documented by historian Altina Waller, suggests he was quite open to patronizing peddlers and lends some credence to the tale. In fact, perhaps the real significance of the story lies in Hatfield's positive response to the outsider, which rings true in echoing much of the literature about peddlers—while also, by the way, contradicting the stereotype of mountain people as suspicious and hostile to strangers. Memoirs of Jewish peddlers, reminiscences of rural inhabitants, and historical studies all reveal that residents of the countryside welcomed these purveyors of products from far-off markets. Mountain people offered no exception, despite their reputation for clannishness. One woman

from Greenbrier County, West Virginia (just outside the coalfields), vividly remembered the peddlers of her youth in the 1880s: "We . . . had Jewish peddlers that came occasionally and gave us something to look forward to. It was almost like having Santa Claus come, even if Mother couldn't afford to buy much. We loved to see the big bundle opened up, for we seldom saw new things."[7]

This warm reception occurred despite the obvious foreign-ness of many peddlers. While some who had lived in America for several years were quite acculturated, others could barely speak the language. In fact, Jacob Epstein conducted much of his business in Yiddish because his peddler-clients were "not proficient in English." After becoming a leading merchant in Middlesboro, Kentucky, Herman Weinstein admitted that he "scarcely knew the value of the goods" he had peddled through eastern Kentucky. Jake Shore, all his life, was much more comfortable speaking Yiddish than English. His grandson recalled that Shore's dog responded only to Yiddish commands. But to the peddlers' customers, the contents of their packs and the tales they told were of greater importance than their strange accents and broken phrases.[8]

Not all coalfield peddlers got their start through the Baltimore Bargain House. Other Jewish wholesalers also realized that the coalfields offered a potentially lucrative new market, though Jacob Epstein was by far the most significant. Because of his influence, Baltimore would remain the dominant urban connection in those parts of the region with the largest Jewish populations: the Pocahontas and New River coalfields of southern West Virginia. Jewish peddlers and merchants in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia's Williamson-Thacker and Logan coalfields, however, were likely to be outfitted by suppliers in Cincinnati (the western terminus of the N&W and a national "center of German-Jewish clothing enterprise") or Knoxville, the city nearest to the southeastern Kentucky coalfields, linked via the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. The

Weinstein brothers, after following the advice of their friends in the sweat shops to seek their fortune beyond New York City, found their way to Middlesboro through a Knoxville connection, although how they ended up in the South in the first place is a little murky. They first traveled to Chattanooga, where "a friend made them a loan, and Herman went to Knoxville. . . . After wandering about for some time he got hold of a pack of trinkets and goods." While Knoxville had no Jewish wholesalers at the time, prominent German-Jewish retail merchants would occasionally outfit peddlers and send them into the nearby coalfields, and Weinstein likely was a beneficiary of this process. He took his pack and headed straight for the mountains, which were "then being opened to the world." After peddling for a short time, he settled in Middlesboro with his brother Sam within a year of the town's founding in 1889.[9]

Role of Networks

Insight into how networks of Jewish wholesalers and retailers led Jewish immigrants to settle in towns throughout the South can be found in Stella Suberman's memoir of growing up Jewish in a small western Tennessee town. Her father, who clerked in a Nashville department store in the 1910s, was approached one day by some of the city's leading Jewish merchants. They presented him with an opportunity: if he would agree to move to the town of Concordia (a pseudonym) to open a small dry goods store, they would give him a letter of credit to purchase his stock from Jewish-owned wholesale houses in St. Louis. Suberman's father had longed for his own store, but not only did he lack the capital, he knew he would be unable to compete in Nashville with the established merchants. He therefore readily agreed to their proposal. But the merchants made their offer not exactly because of their desire to help the young man get a store, nor because they wanted to rid themselves of a potential competitor. Writes Suberman, "The

Nashville men had a whole different idea, and it was for my father to open up a new market for the big St. Louis wholesale houses." They somehow had learned that a (non-Jewish owned) factory was about to open in Concordia, bringing in new workers and new growth. And they just happened to have investments in those St. Louis wholesale houses.[10]

This story reveals how members of Jewish networks helped link the countryside to urban markets by drawing on their own community's resources as well as their knowledge of developments occurring in the larger economic sphere around them. A steady supply of young, recently-arrived immigrants in search of opportunity enabled more established Jewish business owners to expand their customer base into new and promising territory. Certainly the primary incentive of businessmen such as the Nashville merchants and Baltimore's Jacob Epstein was a desire to increase their own business. Yet another motivation also pertained, rooted in the Hebrew concept of *tzedekah*, the communal obligation to help others. By enabling a young man to get a start in life, they were performing a *mitzvah* (often loosely translated as "good deed," the term literally means "commandment"—an act of righteousness commanded by God). That their good deed furthered their own business goals and strengthened the economic condition of the Jewish community as a whole provided confirmation of the intertwining of communal and individual good. In his study of German Jewish immigrants, Avraham Barkai corroborates this dual motivation: "Already-settled earlier immigrants, relatives or not, were eager to take a risk and provide [the peddler] with a few dollars' worth of merchandise on credit, not only because they had the good intention of helping him on his way, but also out of self-interest, to expand their own market." [11]

Suberman's tale also shows that peddling was not the only path from urban obscurity to small-town merchantry. Like her father, many newcomers to the coalfields managed to skip that

laborious step (or had accomplished it before they came to the region). In fact, while many descendants of coalfield Jewish immigrants have a peddling tale to tell of one of their ancestors, the actual number of Jewish peddlers in the region appears to have been surprisingly small. An analysis of more than nine hundred Jews who worked in the Central Appalachian coalfields from the 1870s to the 1950s uncovered only thirty peddlers (though undoubtedly there were many more who did not show up in the sources).[12] This does not mean their prominence in Jewish family lore is undeserved. As founders of the Jewish communities that arose, their influence extended far beyond their numbers. Not only did they establish their own (often quite large) families, they were responsible for bringing numerous relatives and friends to the region. Later newcomers would get their start not as peddlers, but as clerks in stores owned by former peddlers. The literature on small-town American Jewry validates the conspicuous presence of peddlers in the memories of later generations: the occupation provided the basis for Jewish communities throughout the nation.[13]

Nevertheless, peddlers and the migration chains that arose from their initial forays into the region were not the only way Jewish networks drew people to the coalfields. Within predominantly Jewish industries in Baltimore, Cincinnati, even as far away as New York City, rumors of the economic potential of the coalfields were evidently rampant. One coalfield resident described how his uncle Ike Levinson, a toiler in Baltimore's clothing industry, heard "in the trade, through rumors" that "there was a good opportunity for small merchants" in the region. Looking for the chance to work for himself, he arrived in Welch, West Virginia, around 1906 and opened a small clothing store. Later he sent for his sister and brother-in-law. Cincinnati cigar factory worker Isadore Weiner learned of a chance to own a store in Charleston, West Virginia, on the edge of the coalfields. That prospect fell through, but in the Charleston train station he

heard the announcement, "next train to Logan," and saw a stream of people move toward the platform. He asked them why, found out that Logan was a booming coal town, and boarded with them. Within a year, he too had his own clothing store.[14]

Some wholesale houses employed drummers—traveling salesmen—who crisscrossed the land, selling their wares to small-town shopkeepers. "Those drummers were regular grapevines," asserted one Jewish man who grew up in the coalfields. Everywhere they went, they spread information about the places they had visited: not only the climate for small business, but specific job openings as well. For Louis Fink, the drummers' tales about the "black diamonds" of West Virginia led him to close his Baltimore grocery store and open a Beckley clothing shop. Ukrainian Jewish immigrant David Scott came to southern West Virginia around 1904 after hearing from a drummer that a Jewish "horse trader" in Wilcoe needed a helper. The "horse trader" turned out to be Jake Shore, who by then owned more than one coalfield enterprise.[15]

Settlers who arrived in the coalfields through Jewish business networks—peddlers as well as those drawn by rumors and job openings—encouraged many more to follow in their footsteps. For several decades this chain migration brought a constant infusion of "fresh blood" that allowed Jewish coalfield communities to grow. Some men had wives and children in the old country or in U.S. cities, whom they sent for once they became established. Many of the single men went back to Baltimore or New York to find a Jewish woman to marry. (As a man whose father did just that put it, "If you wanted to marry another Jew, New York was full of them.") Often they returned with their new spouse in a short time, suggesting they had recourse to the Jewish custom of arranged marriages. Some men went all the way back to Europe to find a bride. I. L. Shor (cousin of Jake Shore), soon to become a prominent Keystone businessman, returned to Lithuania in 1901 to wed a woman that his parents had picked out for him. Sarah Benjamin

was not thrilled with the match: since her family had a wooden floor in their house and Shor's parents did not, she thought she would be "marrying down." But with her prospects sorely limited, she agreed, and after a hasty wedding the couple returned to Keystone.[16]

Although Sarah Shor may have been mollified to find that "a six room house, fitted out previously," awaited her arrival, women whose marriages brought them to the region often had a difficult time adapting to a new environment not entirely of their own choosing. Those from big cities had to get used to small town life; those from Europe felt isolated in a foreign land far from family and friends, where they could not speak the language. (Fortunately for Sarah, Shor's sister came with her from Europe.) Men, too, who arrived straight from the old country to work for coalfield relatives faced a difficult adjustment. Just making their way to the region could be a challenge: James Pickus, who had had a hard enough time getting out of Russia, continued his misadventures in America as he traveled to his brothers in Beckley. He disembarked at Ellis Island, where an official pinned a tag on him indicating his destination, but missed his train connection in Washington. Undaunted yet hungry, he ducked into the train station restaurant, where he "saw his first fried eggs, his first white bread, and his first black man": the waiter. To his astonishment, the waiter directed the obviously confused foreigner to the Travelers Aid office—in Yiddish. Pickus eventually made it to Beckley unscathed.[17]

Most members of migration chains, like their pioneering relatives before them, came to the coalfields from their homes in large American cities. Louis Koslow, seeking a job to support his wife and baby daughter, journeyed from New York City to Kimball, West Virginia, around 1915 to work in the tailoring business owned by his brothers-in-law. He left his little family behind, but they joined him a year later after a severe infantile paralysis epidemic struck the city. Around the turn of the century, Harry Abel came from Baltimore as a teenager to work for his uncle, Ben

Hurvitz, in Fayette County. Years later he opened his own store in the Fayette County town of Mount Hope. When he became ill in the early 1920s, his brother-in-law Thomas Sopher left a job in a Baltimore cigar shop to help him run the store; Sopher stayed on to open one of his own. Isadore Gorsetman arrived during the Depression from Cleveland, where the economic situation was especially bleak because the steel companies "wouldn't hire Jews." He joined his brother-in-law in Charleston in 1935 and immediately headed into the coalfields, where he peddled household goods from his car.[18]

Clearly, the "push" of adverse conditions in the big cities combined with the "pull" of coalfield opportunities to stimulate Jewish migration to the region. Push factors were primarily economic, though poor living conditions in urban ethnic neighborhoods also played a role. Like the Koslows, Louis Sturm's parents fled New York because of an epidemic (in this case, typhoid) when he was a baby; they landed in Pineville, Kentucky, in the 1890s just as the railroad was being built, and the elder Sturm opened a restaurant for railroad workers. Pull factors often included an already-established relative but in all cases revolved around a newly-developing industrial economy that offered an opportunity for Jews to play a role in providing retail services to a growing population.[19]

There were a few exceptions to the pattern of Jewish networks stimulating migration to the coalfields. Non-Jewish wholesalers also did business in the region and not all rumors about coalfield opportunities originated within Jewish circles. Moreover, not all new arrivals found work within the Jewish community. Hungarian-speaking Mary Schwachter was recruited at Ellis Island to become a boardinghouse keeper for (predominantly Hungarian) immigrant coal miners in Pocahontas, Virginia. As a Baltimore laborer, Sam Polon saw a coal company advertisement promising free transportation to the Pocahontas coalfield for those willing to work as miners.

Louis Schuchat of Baltimore did learn about a job from a Jewish drummer—but the job was bookkeeper for a coal company in Northfork, West Virginia. Yet after holding these initial jobs, all three immigrants determined that their chances for economic advancement lay in more traditionally Jewish occupations. Schuchat went to work as bookkeeper for a saloon (probably Jewish-owned) before opening his own saloon and finally running a general store just outside of the coalfields in Lewisburg, West Virginia (after marrying a daughter of coalfield-peddler-turned-Bluefield-merchant Sam Aaron.) Schwachter moved to Ohio and became a saloonkeeper; Polon ended up in the real estate business.[20]

As even these exceptions demonstrate, the intertwining of family connections, access to resources from within the Jewish community, and cultural modes based on an occupational history that extended back for generations, exerted a strong pull on Jews in their new environment and drew them to the consumer goods sector of the economy rather than the region's dominant preoccupation. Paradoxically, these factors caused Jewish entrepreneurs to bear more than a passing resemblance to the hard-bitten early coal operators chronicled by coalfield historians: in both cases, immigrants with little capital but great determination to succeed drew on their previously-acquired skills, family backgrounds, and cultural resources to build businesses in the region. Admittedly, the dramatically different nature of the two types of businesses makes it difficult to carry the comparison very far. For immigrant Jews, the characteristically-Jewish interpretation of the American Dream revolved not necessarily around gaining economic success or owning a piece of land or other such standard formulations, but rather around achieving self-employment, and more specifically, owning and successfully operating their own store. This somewhat modest goal would sometimes lead to considerable wealth, often to long hours of work and ongoing struggle.[21]

Stories of how coalfield Jewish pioneers made their way to the region suggest that the concept of *takhlis*, of directing one's efforts toward an end-goal, came into play in leading individuals to venture far from the centers of Jewish life. Searching for the right opportunity, most followed a circuitous route, leaving numerous jobs and locales in their wake. After his experience as a theater cleaner and messenger in Washington, David Scott had stints as a North Carolina farm worker and store clerk before learning about the Wilcoe job. Joe Lopinsky made stops in Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, and Ohio before moving to West Virginia. Harry Schwachter wins the prize for most jobs before finding his coalfield niche. After arriving in Baltimore, he joined his mother Mary in Newark, Ohio, where he worked in a glassworks, then as a grocery store clerk, clothing store clerk, and court interpreter. He then clerked in stores in Cincinnati and Hamilton. Finally he saved enough money to open his own store in Coke-Otto, Ohio, which promptly failed, at which point he signed on as a laborer in a Hamilton paper mill. After again saving money, he bought a dilapidated small theater in New Richmond, but could not make a go of it. His second business failure led him to work in his mother's Cincinnati saloon and then briefly as a furniture maker before he saw a want ad in a Cincinnati newspaper: a Jewish merchant in Williamson, West Virginia, needed a clerk. When he arrived in 1909, he was all of twenty years old, and had lived in America less than four years.[22]

The wholesalers, rumors of economic opportunity, and migration chains that caused Jews to gather in various parts of the coalfields clearly demonstrate that the process was far from random. The mythic story of the peddler-turned-shopkeeper, that he decided to settle in a certain town because "that's where the horse died," has little basis in fact, at least in this particular region. Not only did Jews enter into the broad territory of the southern coalfields for concrete reasons, their settlement patterns within the region also followed a distinct logic. Two factors in particular

determined precisely where Jewish communities would arise: the timing of migration in relation to local developments and opportunities, and the railroad connections that led from U.S. cities to specific places within the coalfields.

The New River Coalfield: Home of the First Jewish Coalfield Settlers

The development of the U.S. can be chronologically traced by following the movements of those seekers of opportunity, immigrants and internal migrants. Germans who came to this country in the mid-nineteenth century, Jews and non-Jews, settled heavily in parts of the country undergoing economic expansion at that time, particularly the Ohio Valley and the Midwest. The economic growth of that era was closely related to the spread of transportation networks: the canals, turnpikes, and railroads that opened connections between the settled east and the fertile lands west of the Appalachian mountains. Those parts of Appalachia that saw development at mid century—the western and northern portions, as well as the Blue Ridge-and-valley section that was becoming well-integrated into the southern cotton economy—also, not coincidentally, became home to recently-arrived German Jews. Wheeling, the Ohio River terminus of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, saw the formation of West Virginia's first Jewish congregation in 1849, and German Jews also settled in other B&O towns in western Maryland and northern West Virginia. Growing towns in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, such as Winchester and Staunton, attracted some German-Jewish settlers. Trading centers located along key river routes, such as Knoxville, Tennessee, and Charleston, West Virginia, developed German Jewish communities by the 1860s and early 1870s. But the undeveloped interior of Central Appalachia, home to a scattered and sparse farming population, lacked the infrastructure to support larger numbers of people, and immigrants, by and large, stayed away.[23]

This began to change in 1873 with the completion of the Chesapeake & Ohio main line between Richmond, Virginia, and the newly-created Ohio River town of Huntington, West Virginia (named for C&O magnate Collis P. Huntington). As the railway snaked its way through southern West Virginia, it opened to outside markets the rich coal lands in and around the New River Gorge in Fayette County, southeast of Charleston. Small coal mining settlements immediately began to appear along the railroad and in 1874 the C&O shipped more than 158,000 tons of coal. The New River coalfield thus became the first of the southern coalfields to develop; a full decade would pass before another railroad company ventured into the mountainous Appalachian plateau.[24]

The New River Gorge had not been completely isolated before the railroad arrived. In 1790 the "Old State Road" pushed through the mountains between Lewisburg and the Kanawha River. Where the road met New River deep in the Gorge, a man named Peter Bowyer established a ferry service and a tiny settlement known as Bowyers Ferry grew up on the bank. The C&O built a depot there in 1873 and re-named the site Sewell Station, later shortened to Sewell. It quickly became the first commercial center for the Gorge's small mining communities, with a population of more than three hundred by 1880. According to local historians, "Entrepreneurs sensed business opportunities and migrated to Sewell as the C&O Railway was being completed. One of the first was Arnold Midleburg, who opened the first store at Sewell in 1871 after he had secured the ferry rights of the pioneer Peter Bowyer. He also operated a water-powered sawmill on Mann's Creek and was the first to ship lumber from the New River Gorge. He built a row of twelve homes between the C&O Railway tracks and New River," known as "Red Row" because all the homes were painted red.[25]

Arnold Midleburg thus gains the distinction of being the first known Jew to settle in the

southern coalfields. Not surprisingly, given the early date of his arrival, he offers an exception to the overwhelmingly East European background of the region's Jewish population. Midleburg came to the U.S. in 1866 from either Germany or Austria (according to differing census records) and located in Sewell after spending time in Charleston. By 1880 he was an established dry goods merchant living with his German-born wife Berta, three small children, two servants, and two boarders (laborer Leopold Goldberg and clerk Frederick Schodel, German immigrants, both probably Jewish). He returned to Charleston by 1900 but his sons Ferd and Charles remained in Sewell to run the family businesses, which variously included dry goods, groceries, a saloon, and a bottling company that sold carbonated beverages. Ferd would later become a prominent Logan theater owner and residential real estate developer. Charles followed the pattern of many rural merchants and became the Sewell postmaster and justice of the peace, as well as a member of the state legislature. By 1920 he had moved to Charleston where he operated a coal mining supply business and remained active in local politics.[26]

The Midleburg story is one of "firsts": Arnold Midleburg built the first store in the first local center of the first coalfield in the entire region, two years before the completion of the first railroad. The pioneering Midleburg family would both reflect and depart from patterns exhibited by the coalfield Jews who followed them. German Jews would be a rarity in the region—though the earliest Jewish settlers, who came to the New River and Pocahontas coalfields before the mid-1880s, had German backgrounds. The family's connection to Charleston was unusual; most Jews were drawn to the coalfields because of networks and rail links emanating from large cities well outside the region, especially Baltimore—though starting in the 1930s, as transportation systems improved, Jewish families in the Logan and New River areas developed closer ties with Charleston's Jewish community. It is doubtful that any other coalfield Jew served as a justice of

the peace, since that role usually was filled by members of the local elite, descendants of the region's small, well-established landowning class. Yet Jewish involvement in local politics would become, if not widespread, certainly not uncommon. Charles Midleburg's connection to the coal industry (and his father's lumber interests) would also deviate from the norm. However, the family's other commercial endeavors, from saloons to dry goods to theaters to residential real estate, were highly typical of the kinds of businesses coalfield Jews would establish.

Arnold Midleburg's arrival in Sewell even before the C&O finished constructing its railroad highlights another common phenomenon: in many coalfield towns, Jewish entrepreneurs were present from the very beginning as peddlers, small shopkeepers and clerks, or saloon owners. Often, from their "ports of entry" within the coalfields, the immigrants or their grown children moved to other parts of the region as it developed, just as Ferd Midleburg did. Sewell attracted a small number of other Jews who operated stores there in the 1880s and 1890s before moving on to coalfield towns that soon equaled or surpassed it in economic importance. Joe Lopinsky and Ben Hurvitz, like Midleburg, came to Sewell from Charleston. By 1900 they had established Sewell's Great Eastern Bargain House and soon opened branches in several other Fayette County towns. William Schaffer and his son Leo came from Austria in the mid-1880s. They conducted a store in Sewell and Leo went on to become one of the more colorful characters in the nearby fabled New River railroad town of Thurmond. Soon, however, Jews who entered the New River area bypassed Sewell altogether, though most of them had ties to the original Jews of Sewell. Between 1890 and 1920 Jewish families came directly to small towns and villages such as Mount Hope, Red Star, Scarbro, and Oak Hill.[27]

These newcomers avoided Sewell because the town did not develop much beyond its initial boom. In 1910 it contained 356 people, only a couple dozen more than it had in 1880. The

topography and rail system of the New River area were more conducive to the growth of several small mining centers rather than one regional center, until development shifted to the south bank of the river and the Raleigh County seat, Beckley, emerged as the area's major hub. Moreover, coal exploitation in the New River area stalled shortly after the C&O completed its rail line. The national depression of the 1870s, the railroad's lack of a deep-water terminus until the 1880s, and the C&O's halfhearted promotion of coal development retarded industrial progress for at least a decade. By that time, another railroad company had entered the coalfields, and its owners' determination to base their profits on coal traffic greatly accelerated the transformation of the region. Whereas Jews in the New River area remained scattered in small towns until coalescing in Beckley after 1910, the first actual Jewish community in the region formed in the Pocahontas coalfield by the mid-1880s, in the same town from which the Norfolk & Western railway shipped its first load of coal in 1883: the boomtown of Pocahontas, Virginia.[28]

The Boomtowns: Pocahontas, Keystone, Middlesboro

When people think of boomtowns in American history, the West comes immediately to mind. Yet boomtowns typically arise in frontier places undergoing incorporation into the capitalist system, and scholars have indeed referred to the Central Appalachian plateau as "one of America's last frontiers."[29] Bypassed by the railroads until the late nineteenth century and then plunged into industrialization, the region offered perfect conditions for the rise of instant towns where newcomers and opportunity seekers of all sorts gathered, drawn from the local countryside as well as far-off lands—entrepreneurs large and small and, especially, multitudes of young, single male workers who lent a raucous character to the proceedings. Not all the newly-emerging coalfield towns took on the wide-open traits of a classic boomtown. County seats, as centers of

local government, tended to undergo a somewhat less boisterous transformation even as they experienced precipitous growth. But the towns offering the earliest opportunities and the fastest early growth were not county seats, but rather towns that sprang up at strategic rail locations: places such as Sewell and Thurmond, Pocahontas, Middlesboro, and Keystone. All these towns gained reputations for hosting various types of disorderly behavior while also providing goods and services to surrounding populations. The latter three would become home to the region's first Jewish communities before the turn of the century.[30]

The early boomtowns of the coalfields have taken on a legendary character that local historians continue to promote; the title of one recent book, *Thurmond, Dodge City of the East*, seems an apt description of the riverside rail town known for its saloons and brothels, killings that "were almost an everyday occurrence" (a major exaggeration), and the continuous running poker game at the splendiferous Dunglen Hotel. Thurmond's two most notable personalities were the fierce, gigantic police chief Harrison Ash, "a lawman of easy conscience," and "mayor" Leo Schaffer, an Austrian Jew described in one account as "one of the memorable and lovable characters of all Thurmond's romantic history" and in another as "not above interpreting the law in whatever manner was the most profitable." The most famous Schaffer story has the mayor fining a dead man "the contents of his pocketbook—eighty-one dollars and one gold watch" for, depending on the version, carrying a gun without a permit or committing suicide within the town limits (the man, apparently in a drunken stupor, had jumped into the river and drowned).[31]

However appealing (or appalling, depending on your point of view), Schaffer was one of only a handful of Jews to ever live in Thurmond. The real beginning of Jewish communal history in the coalfields occurred in southwest Virginia, where, states historian Jerry Bruce Thomas,

"with the opening of the Pocahontas coal field, the Industrial Revolution . . . arrived in Central Appalachia." As the nation emerged from the depression of the 1870s, the time had come for the region's coal to establish a presence in eastern markets. By late 1881, a group of Philadelphia capitalists had incorporated the Norfolk & Western Railroad and laid out a route through what was then known as the Flat Top coalfield. As part of a strategy to promote massive coal development and ensure profitable traffic along the route, N&W officials had also supervised land acquisition throughout the territory and had overseen the creation of the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company, the region's first land and coal development corporation. This company immediately commenced to build a town and mining operation at the mouth of Laurel Creek, site of the most promising outcropping of coal. During 1882, town building and coal mining took place concurrently at the newly-named Pocahontas, Virginia, as the N&W constructed its railway into the region. Newcomers flooded into town, with African Americans and Hungarian immigrants arriving to make up a substantial portion of the workforce. In early 1883, coalfield promoter Jed Hotchkiss reported on the town's progress in his Staunton-based journal *The Virginias*: "Last February its location was a tangled forest . . . now it contains nearly one thousand people, has seven mercantile establishments, a hotel, etc." With completion of the railway in March 1883, thousands of tons of coal waiting at the depot finally headed east.[32]

Just as at Sewell, the activities generated by the N&W attracted entrepreneurs even before completion of the railroad. The Southwest Virginia Improvement Company owned around half the land in the town of Pocahontas, upon which it constructed mine buildings, houses for workers and their families, and a company store. It allowed the other half to be developed by individuals such as Alexander St. Clair, who had been eagerly buying up property in the area since 1877 (in fact, in 1881 the company purchased some of its landholdings from him). St. Clair sold his

remaining parcels to newly-arrived entrepreneurs, including one Michael Bloch, who in December 1882 purchased a town lot on St. Clair Street "under condition that no intoxicating liquors be sold." Bloch opened a general store that would evolve into the Bloch & Company department store, a fixture in Pocahontas for at least the next forty years.[33]

Bloch was a German Jew who had immigrated to the U.S. in the 1860s. By April 1883 he and his Pennsylvania-born wife were joined by Jacob and Lena Baach, who became Bloch's business partners. The Baaches had lived in Virginia since their arrival from Germany (also in the 1860s). By 1887 a Baach daughter and son-in-law accounted for the third German-Jewish family in town—and any future German-Jewish families would also be related to the Blochs or Baaches. In fact, virtually no Jews of German descent would enter the entire southern coalfield region after these early Pocahontas and New River pioneers until the 1930s, when some refugees from Nazi Germany settled in a few towns.[34]

The Jewish community of Pocahontas gained its members primarily from the first wave of East European immigrants who began to arrive in the U.S. in the 1880s. They appear in the town's historical record by 1888 and county deed books show that at least five Jewish individuals or families of East European descent lived in Pocahontas by the end of the decade. The actual number was probably a good deal higher: by 1892 enough Jews had gathered to form the first Jewish religious association in the coalfields, an Orthodox congregation that reflected the traditional upbringing its members had received in Eastern Europe. The two known rabbis who served the congregation before 1900 came from Lithuania.[35]

In 1900 at least ninety-five Jews in nineteen households lived in Pocahontas and by 1910 the Jewish population had grown to a recorded peak of 149 people in twenty-nine households. While this may not seem a huge amount compared to the millions of Jewish immigrants

streaming into Ellis Island during the era, put in proportional perspective this tiny outpost of East European Jewry compares not unfavorably with some of its big-city counterparts: in 1910, Pocahontas Jews constituted 6 percent of the town's total population of 2,452; Jews made up roughly 9 percent of the population in Chicago and Baltimore, less than 8 percent in Cincinnati. And the proportion of Jews in the Pocahontas population was not even the highest in the coalfields: the Keystone Jewish community held that distinction.[36]

Two factors account for the flourishing Jewish population in Pocahontas. One was internal: Jewish households tended to be large, with many children and elderly grandparents often present. More important, economic conditions were favorable. The town experienced two early catastrophes: a massive coal mine disaster in March 1884 that killed almost two hundred miners (the worst mining disaster in American history at that time) and the depression of the mid-1890s, which caused stagnation throughout the coal industry. But as a Tazewell County historian writing in 1920 put it, "In 1897 the rainbow of prosperity once again hovered . . . and its gracious influence has remained here until the present time." The county's population doubled between 1880 and 1910 as mines opened around Pocahontas and throughout the Clinch Valley. The expansion of the Pocahontas coalfield into neighboring West Virginia especially enlivened the business climate of the town, which was situated practically on the state border.[37]

The growing industrial activity and burgeoning population enabled Jews to operate a variety of retail establishments. From 1900 to 1920 they served as clothiers, tailors, milliners, saloonists, jewelers, and confectioners, with the occasional junk dealer, restaurant proprietor, and hardware or furniture store owner thrown in. But it took a while for such economic specialization to develop. Before 1910 Jewish enterprise revolved around either dry goods or liquor, and both these types of business would continue to thrive for many years.[38]

Saloons and liquor stores played an important role in Jewish economic activity for good reason. Businesses respond to consumer demand, and the demand for liquor was sky high. As the first commercial center in an area overflowing with single workingmen, Pocahontas immediately assumed the characteristics of a wide-open town. In mid-1883 the few businesses that had already opened included "'one or two liquor stores'" and a "'ten pin alley,'" recalled the wife of coal mine superintendent William Lathrop. Mrs. Lathrop feared payday nights, "'for by that time the men had visited the saloons on the outskirts of town, and were using their firearms in a most reckless way.'" At first the sale of alcohol was officially forbidden: Tazewell County was legally dry. Yet liquor flowed freely despite meager attempts to control it (for example, the conditions of Michael Bloch's 1882 deed). According to local historian Jack Jones, "the 'Blind Tigers', as the town's liquor establishments were called, were infamous throughout the coal fields. . . . Illicit whisky traffic was run over and above board with apparently no fear of the local law or its officers." The situation got so bad that a local newspaper editor led a successful campaign to exempt the town from the county's liquor laws, enabling it to license regular saloons and liquor stores. "As soon as this was done, the morals of the town steadily improved and it settled down to become a peaceful, law-abiding community," claims Jones. While it is unknown whether Jews were involved in the "Blind Tigers," many earned their living from the liquor trade during its legal years. In 1910 twenty-two out of sixty breadwinners (37 percent) either owned or worked in saloons or liquor stores; a total of fifty-five members of the Jewish community were supported by the liquor trade (also 37 percent).[39]

The town of Pocahontas began to lose its economic elan as early as 1916, when statewide prohibition came to Virginia. The new law effectively extinguished a recent mini-boom—the state of West Virginia had gone dry in mid-1914, causing the thirsty population north of the

border to descend on the town until the Virginia law went into effect. Mining activities continued to support local commerce, but Pocahontas was no longer—had not been for some time—the only commercial center of the coalfield that bore its name. It now competed with newer towns in southern West Virginia, especially nearby Bluefield, the region's bustling rail hub. Since the mid-1880s the N&W had been busy expanding into the heart of the Pocahontas coalfield, which lay in McDowell County. One of its first moves had been to select a grassy summit some ten miles outside of the coalfield in Mercer County, where its placement of a roundhouse, regional office, and other facilities attracted commercial activity and formed the basis of a new city. By 1900 Bluefield had become one of West Virginia's largest municipalities, a regional shipping and distribution center with a population of forty-six hundred.[40]

Many Jewish families from the town of Pocahontas gravitated to Bluefield, which by 1920 had the region's largest Jewish community at around 150 people. The Jewish population of Pocahontas had shrunk to seventy-one by that time, less than half its 1910 count. But for some reason Jews were slow to make Bluefield their home. New arrivals from Baltimore used it as a point of entry into the coalfield; they chose to settle in smaller towns where the chief occupation was coal mining. In 1900 only forty-five Jews lived in Bluefield, while almost three times as many lived in three small towns in McDowell County. Of those towns, the vast majority resided in the most notorious boomtown in the southern coalfields: Keystone.[41]

The construction of the Elkhorn Tunnel in 1888 enabled the N&W to enter the mountainous terrain of McDowell County and spelled the end of an agrarian way of life for its residents. The county had the smallest population in the state in 1880, with around three thousand people and no real towns. A handful of settlements located at crossroads or waterways served as post offices

and hosted the occasional general store. Within a few short years after the railroad's arrival, McDowell County boasted several towns, numerous coal camps, and a multicultural population of more than seven thousand by 1890 and eighteen thousand by 1900, a 610 percent increase since 1880. The new arrivals included Pennsylvanians (who named the town of Keystone after their home state), whites from surrounding areas, African Americans from Virginia and North Carolina, and immigrants from all over the world. By 1915 a state handbook attested to a complete turnaround in the county's demographic profile when it proclaimed that "McDowell is one of the most densely populated of the West Virginia counties. From one end to the other one are prosperous towns and coal mining camps."[42]

The brothers Wolf and Harry Bank participated in an early stage of this transformation. Their own trip through the Elkhorn Tunnel around 1893 constituted the final leg of a journey made relatively easy by the rail system that now connected McDowell County to the city of Baltimore. The Banks probably started by picking up their packs at the Baltimore Bargain House and heading to the B&O rail terminal. If they hopped on the 11:10 p.m. west-bound B&O train, they would have arrived at Shenandoah Junction in West Virginia's eastern panhandle less than two hours later. There they would have boarded the 1:15 a.m. N&W train. Traveling south on that railway's Shenandoah Valley line, they would have arrived in Roanoke around 7:45 a.m. for their 8 a.m. transfer to the N&W main line. By noon they would have reached Bluefield, where the train might have made a brief stop before making the ten-mile trip through the tunnel into McDowell County, the heart of the Pocahontas coalfield. The train would have traveled along Elkhorn Creek until it met up with the Tug Fork and then followed the Tug into the next county—but the brothers would have disembarked by then, somewhere along Elkhorn Creek, where coal camps were springing up.[43]

The Banks each peddled for a while before settling down around 1894. While Harry chose to locate at a sparsely-inhabited spot along the railway called Norwood (soon to be renamed Kimball after the president of the N&W), Wolf selected a more immediately promising locale further east along Elkhorn Creek. Keystone, one of the first independent towns in the county, did not exist in 1890; a small hamlet named Cassville occupied its site. In 1892 the N&W opened a depot there and the Keystone Coal & Coke Company began operations, giving the town a name and an impetus to grow. Within eight years the town had a population of just over one thousand, the largest in the county. Remarkably, fully 10 percent of these residents were Jewish—giving Keystone a larger percentage of Jews than any major U.S. city outside of New York.[44]

The Bank brothers would prove critically important to the growth of Jewish communities in Keystone and elsewhere in the coalfields. In a notable example of chain migration, they were joined by a sister, two brothers-in-law, and two first cousins; one of those was joined by three more brothers-in-law—not to mention the spouses and children of all these people. But Wolf was not the first Jewish resident of Keystone. In 1892, the year the town came into existence, Louis Morse came from parts unknown, Max Hermanson relocated from nearby Pocahontas, Kopel and Goldie Hyman and their grown sons came from Baltimore (they too may have had a Pocahontas connection, since several Hymans lived in the Virginia town). Other Pocahontas families arrived in the mid-1890s. Former peddler Jake Shore and his cousin I. L. Shor (who for some reason dropped the "e" from his last name) and a few more Jewish families also found their way to Keystone during the decade. Like the Banks, these early settlers encouraged relatives to join them, and by 1900 McDowell County had a Jewish population of at least 126, with 110 congregated in Keystone: fifty-four adults and fifty-six children in twenty-five households. All but five of the adults were immigrants, forty-three from Russia, four from Austria-Hungary, and

only two from Germany.[45]

Chain migration works only if the opportunity is there. In rural towns across the South—such as the one Stella Suberman describes in her memoir—one or two "Jew stores" were sufficient; the local economy could not support any others. Her family could not encourage relatives to follow them, and the lack of a Jewish community contributed to their eventual decision to move back east. The same cannot be said for McDowell County, which would, at its peak economic development, boast three small Jewish congregations, in Keystone, Kimball, and Welch. In the 1890s, with coal mining just getting underway, the county was a land of as-yet-unrealized potential, with Keystone as the likeliest spot to offer a livelihood for small retailers.[46]

Economic potential is in the eye of the beholder, and to hard-scrabble Jewish immigrants looking for a start, the tough little town must have appeared to be a beautiful sight. Louis Zaltzman came to Keystone with his parents in 1896 at the age of four, after a brief stay in Bluefield. He later wrote, "The community there was small and rough, no electric lights or water supply, dirt and unpaved streets and roads, and very little law. It was a frontier town with fourteen saloons and about fifteen Jewish families." These families formed B'nai Israel, the first Jewish congregation in southern West Virginia, before the turn of the century. By 1903 Keystone Jews had joined with the nearby Pocahontas Jewish community to establish a cemetery on a hill located on the state border that became known locally as "Hebrew Mountain." In 1904 the Keystone congregation built an Orthodox synagogue complete with a *mikvah* (ritual bath) and balcony seating for women.[47]

Congregation members maintained their religious tradition in the midst of a town distinctly known for its lack of propriety, not to mention morality. As a boomtown, Keystone's reputation soon rivaled, actually surpassed, that of all other towns in the region. While Thurmond may have

been the "Dodge City of the East," Keystone became known as the "Sodom and Gomorrah" of the coalfields. A former West Virginia attorney general contended that the local power structure—in other words, the area's coal operators—insisted on a wide open town in order to attract and retain labor, which was in short supply. The town's red-light district, Cinder Bottom, was called a "revelation of human depravity" in a well-circulated anti-Keystone tract written by an anonymous "Virginia lad." Take away the hyperbole of the moralistic commentary of the time, and what is left is a rowdy, unrestrained boomtown where drinking, gambling, prostitution, and other forms of "commercial exploitation of human weakness" played a significant role in the economy.[48]

Not that such exploitation was the town's only function. As a commercial center, Keystone supplied all kinds of retail and distributive services, while (as in Pocahontas) a good portion of the town was taken up by coal mining surface operations. The bulk of the population consisted of coal miners, railroad workers, and their families; merchants, some mining officials, and a handful of professionals also made their homes there. Even the town's most vociferous critics took pains to point out that decent people lived in Keystone, although according to the "Virginia lad," "the percent of good ones is mighty low." A staunch white supremacist, he had no doubt ruled out half of the residents by virtue of skin color: McDowell County had the largest black population in the coalfields by the turn of the century and more African Americans lived in Keystone than any other town, a fact which added to its dubious reputation among the region's majority white population.[49]

An analysis of Keystone business directories offers some insight into the economic development of coalfield boomtowns and how Jewish merchants reacted to the opportunities these towns provided. As in Pocahontas, much early entrepreneurial activity could be found in

the liquor trade. Half of the ten Jewish business owners listed in an 1898 directory operated saloons, while saloons constituted 40 percent of all businesses in town (Jews owned five out of the seventeen saloons listed). However, as Keystone grew, it could sustain more diverse enterprises, and both Jewish and non-Jewish merchants moved with the demand. The percentage of Jews engaged in the liquor business decreased steadily after 1898, as did the overall ratio of saloons to other commercial ventures. A telling example is the growth of the retail clothing sector. In 1898 Jews owned all three clothing establishments; in 1904 they owned all eight. They evidently had the wholesale connections and previous experience to dominate this area once the demand appeared, and by 1904 more Jews owned clothing stores than any other type of business. Nevertheless, Jewish enterprise from the 1890s through the 1920s exhibited notable diversity. While clothing and dry goods stores predominated and saloons remained important until prohibition came to in West Virginia in 1914, Jews worked as butchers, tailors, restaurant managers, theater operators, jewelers, grocers, and junk dealers. They were store owners, real estate developers, clerks, salesmen, and bartenders. They also provided services as skilled workers, with at least one or two Jewish plumbers, carpenters, and mechanics. In fact, Jews did just about everything, except participate in the one industry that thoroughly dominated the local economy: the coal industry.[50]

Despite Keystone's growing economic diversity in the first two decades of the century, the liquor trade remained a cornerstone of its commercial vitality, the staple that allowed it to stand out among the growing towns around it. Like Pocahontas, the town was hit hard by prohibition. Although its red light district survived in reduced (and outlawed) form, the end of legal liquor sales had a ripple effect on commerce. Long-established businesses closed and the local newspaper reported in late 1915 that real estate values had declined by half. The Keystone Jewish

population underwent a shift that exactly mirrored the Pocahontas Jewish decline: in 1910 it reached a recorded peak of 147 and probably continued to rise until prohibition; by 1920 it was halved to seventy-two, while the town's overall population dropped from two thousand to eighteen hundred. The decline would not reverse: the Great Depression of the 1930s struck the coalfields hard, and Keystone did not rebound as well as other coalfield towns in the following decade. The generation of Jews who grew up in the boomtown would have to find economic opportunity elsewhere once they came of age.[51]

Most of them did so without having to leave the coalfields. The town's Jewish population—especially youth raised in Keystone between 1900 and 1915—ended up seeding Jewish enclaves and communities in villages and towns throughout the region. The advance of the rail and coal industries deeper into the mountains opened up new areas of growth and new potential for small business. Young Jewish entrepreneurs did as their parents had done: they followed the course of coal and rail activity, settling in newly-developing towns within the Pocahontas coalfield or nearby coalfields.[52]

The influence of Keystone on the development of coalfield Jewish communities was considerable: more than seventy Keystone Jews relocated to other coalfield towns during the 1910s and 1920s, where most of them started their own families. Several people simply moved to the adjoining town of Northfork, a mere one mile away, and Jewish families in the two towns sustained the Keystone congregation into the 1940s. Others heard about opportunities in places a little more distant. Young Hungarian immigrant Rudolph Eiland had recently arrived in the Keystone-Northfork area and was working as a clerk in the mid-1910s when he decided to move to a more promising locale one county away. According to his son, "They were just opening up the coal mines. Everyone said Logan was the place to go." In some cases pioneer Keystone

merchants relocated with their families. Jake Shore, for example, moved to the McDowell County town of War just as coal mining took off there around World War I; he and his sons became the town's leading clothing and dry goods merchants. More commonly, the immigrant generation of the 1890s remained in Keystone while their sons and daughters dispersed throughout the region. Many Keystone Jewish children grew up to become the founders and mainstays of Jewish communities in the county seat towns which took over as leading coalfield centers during the 1910s.[53]

The movement of Jews to county seat towns can be seen as a second phase in the development of Jewish coalfield communities, and not coincidentally, a second phase in the development of the coalfields themselves. But before turning to the county seats, it is necessary to consider the third major coalfield boomtown, a town whose almost mythical founding and dramatic history of booms and busts made it an extreme example of trends that occurred throughout the region. Middlesboro, Kentucky, was the brainchild of Scottish speculator and promoter Alexander Arthur, who toured the area around the Cumberland Gap in 1886 and designed a grand plan to develop the coal-rich territory. With the backing of British capitalists, he formed the American Association Ltd. and secured options on some eighty-thousand acres in the Yellow Creek valley—using highly dubious maneuverings to acquire the property from local mountaineers. At a spot in Bell County, the Association reserved some five thousand acres to create a town to serve as a commercial hub for the anticipated coal boom. Before the railroad arrived in the fall of 1889, town-building was well underway. By 1890 Middlesboro had more than three thousand inhabitants, making it by far the largest town in the southern coalfields. It had a link to Louisville and nearby Knoxville via the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, a streetcar

system, numerous businesses, six banks, seven churches, a library, an opera house, and would soon boast a lavish nearby resort and one of the nation's first golf courses, built by some of the displaced Englishmen who descended on the area.[54]

Middlesboro's bust followed almost immediately and would prove just as spectacular as its rise. The hasty development of the town and the rail line caused immediate problems: a portent of things to come occurred during the first scheduled train ride in 1889, which departed Knoxville with much fanfare. The train wrecked in the mountains, causing the death of Knoxville's mayor and seriously injuring Alexander Arthur. A disastrous fire wiped out Middlesboro's business district in May 1890, the very month the town incorporated. That same year, the collapse of a British investment bank with financial interests in the region caused the speculative bubble to burst. As overseas bondholders demanded repayment, the town sank into default. The financial panic of 1893 put the finishing touches on this debacle, causing numerous personal and business bankruptcies. All the banks closed, businesses shut down, and "the citizenry left in droves," according to one account. Meanwhile, Middlesboro's creditors secured passage of a state law requiring that the town pay off its debts before paying for its municipal needs. This law, until its repeal in 1906, hobbled the town's ability to provide essential services and added to the raw boomtown atmosphere, especially in the "dark ages" before recovery began around 1897. A paucity of law enforcement officers enabled "vice" to flourish virtually unchecked; like other boomtowns, Middlesboro developed a reputation for its less-than-respectable activities, violence, and general mayhem.[55]

Jewish merchants joined in the heady days of Middlesboro's founding, with some fifteen families living in town in 1891. Several remained after the crash, and perhaps their loyalty to their new home accounts for the effusive praise heaped upon Jewish merchants—especially the

Weinsteins—by the local press. One May 1900 article in the *Middlesboro News* recalled the Weinsteins' business activities "during the hardest times" and noted, "With the business and enterprise that has characterized the Jew merchants here their business grew rapidly." A local historian later asserted that the Jewish community had been "one of the main forces holding the town together during the 'bust' days of the '90s," and Jewish merchants who hung on through the grim years aided in the town's recovery. As the nation rallied from the depression in the late 1890s, increased coal mining activity in the surrounding countryside led to a rebound and Middlesboro reemerged as the leading town of southeastern Kentucky, with a population of more than seven thousand by 1910.[56]

Its Jewish community grew as well. By 1910 Middlesboro had eighteen Jewish households with around eighty people, most of them related to the families who had come to the area in the 1890s. Like the other boomtowns, however, this number fell by 1920, to around sixty. Jewish employment also followed the pattern previously described: Jews owned or worked in a diversity of enterprises, with an emphasis on dry goods and clothing stores. Jake Goodfriend was a dry goods clerk in 1900; a few years later he owned a wholesale liquor business with non-Jewish partners. Emanuel Harrison was a peddler in 1900, a real estate agent in 1910. After the Weinsteins sold their department store in 1916, Sam, trained as a carpenter in Lithuania, became a contractor and residential real estate developer (Herman moved to Cincinnati).[57]

Despite Middlesboro's growth and the possibility of economic mobility for entrepreneurs, the Jewish population of the city and surrounding counties never approached the numbers who settled in southern West Virginia. The reason was more geographic than economic: with the L&N as the rail route into and out of the Cumberland Mountains, the area was not as accessible to large Jewish populations on the east coast. The railroad's terminals in Atlanta and Cincinnati

did not approach Baltimore as a population center for East European Jewry—Cincinnati offered connections to Jewish wholesalers but did not have many immigrants looking for opportunity. In 1891 the L&N and the N&W linked up at Norton, Virginia (named for L&N president Eckstein Norton), but Jewish immigrants from Baltimore traveling to the Cumberland Gap through this connection would have had to pass up booming coalfields along the way. Middlesboro's proximity to Knoxville, only seventy miles away, also may have helped limit its Jewish population. While some early residents arrived from that city, in later years they were likely to move back so as to partake in a much larger Jewish community. In fact, several Knoxville Jewish merchants operated businesses in the southeastern Kentucky coalfields without ever moving into the mountains.[58]

Nevertheless, Middlesboro and its environs managed to attract enough Jews to form an active congregation. Its initial task was the founding of a cemetery in 1904 on land donated by fruit store merchant Benjamin Horr, whose granddaughter, six-year-old Rebecca Ginsburg, was the first person buried. The congregation never built a synagogue but conducted services in a space rented from the Masons. It drew its membership from small coal towns within a forty- to fifty-mile radius encompassing both sides of the Cumberland Gap. Norton, Coeburn, and Appalachia, Virginia, as well as LaFollette, Tennessee, each had a few interrelated Jewish families who converged on Middlesboro to participate in communal life. The Bell County seat, Pineville, contributed many congregation members, mostly related to the Eusters, a large extended family of six brothers and two sisters, spouses and children, who may have pre-dated the Weinsteins in their arrival in the region. (The railroad came to Pineville in 1888, a year before it reached Middlesboro.) Like other coalfield county seat towns, the number of Jews in Pineville jumped between 1910 and 1920, doubling from twenty to forty even as the Middlesboro

Jewish population declined. Eusters eventually spread to another Kentucky coalfield county seat, Harlan—and that town would later challenge Middlesboro as the center of Jewish life in southeastern Kentucky.[59]

The County Seat Towns

As a web of rail lines spread through the coalfields and the mining industry placed its mark upon the land, the human geography of the region began to take shape. By the 1910s each coalfield had a network of mining settlements, from rough camps to larger coal towns, connected by rail to each other and to a local commercial hub. Of the three boomtowns described above, only Middlesboro advanced much beyond its boomtown status. Its geographic position, rail connections, and extensive infrastructure enabled it to grow into a regional service center for the coal economy in southeastern Kentucky, northeastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia. Bluefield served the same function in southern West Virginia, and the two small cities became the gateways to the southern coalfields.[60]

But other towns developed into local commercial and social centers, providing goods and services, recreation and entertainment to their own rising populations as well as to people living in the farms and company towns of the surrounding countryside. County seats had a built-in advantage in seizing this coveted role since courthouse activities necessitated a permanent cohort of professionals, white collar workers, and ancillary services while also drawing people into town from throughout the county for various purposes. Several county seats established themselves as the leading centers of their respective coalfields in the first two decades of the new century. Some were brand-new towns whose coal industry-based leaders had managed to wrest control of local government away from older, agricultural-based county seats. For example, in 1892 the

recently-created town of Welch replaced Peerysville as the McDowell County seat "after a bitter election followed by court proceedings." Peerysville sank into obscurity; eventually coal mines opened in its vicinity and it took on a new name: English. Other county seats had been long-established and their embrace of the coal economy enabled them to continue as the focal point of their particular county or coalfield—in new and greatly expanded form. Logan and Beckley provide two prominent examples.[61]

Like the boomtowns, the county seat towns experienced tremendous and sudden growth, though during a later period and under somewhat more controlled conditions (see Table 1). The county seats that would emerge to service the four southern West Virginia coalfields were Williamson (Mingo County seat, Williamson-Thacker coalfield); Welch (McDowell County seat, Pocahontas coalfield); Logan (Logan County seat, Logan coalfield); and Beckley (Raleigh County seat, New River coalfield). In 1900 these towns each had from three to six hundred residents while Keystone and Pocahontas had 1,088 and 2,789, respectively; rail lines had not even reached Logan or Beckley. With the first decade of the new century the county seats took off: the total population of the four towns quadrupled between 1900 and 1910, then doubled the following decade and grew 65 percent more from 1920 to 1930. By 1920 each town's population far surpassed the numbers in Keystone and Pocahontas—in fact the county seats included many former residents of the declining boomtowns. County seat towns in the eastern Kentucky coalfields also underwent rapid growth, although the process occurred later than in southern West Virginia because of the relatively late arrival of the L&N. The decade after 1910 saw the railroad advance through Harlan, Letcher, Perry, and Breathitt counties, accompanied by a coal boom and town development.[62]

Table 1
Total Population of Coalfield Towns with Jewish Congregations

Town / County / Coalfield	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960
County Seat Towns							
Beckley, W. Va. / Raleigh / New River	342	2,161	4,149	9,357	12,852	19,397	18,642
Logan, W. Va. / Logan / Logan	444	1,640	2,998	4,396	5,166	5,079	4,158
Welch, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	442	1,526	3,232	5,376	6,264	6,603	5,313
Williamson, W. Va. / Mingo / Thacker	600*	3,561	6,819	9,410	8,366	8,624	6,746
Harlan, Ky. / Harlan / Harlan	557	657	2,647	4,327	5,122	4,786	4,177
Regional Service Centers							
Bluefield, W. Va.**	4,644	11,188	15,282	19,339	20,641	21,506	19,256
Middlesboro, Ky.	4,162	7,305	8,041	10,350	11,777	14,482	12,607
Other Towns							
Keystone, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	1,088	2,047	1,839	1,897	2,942	2,594	1,457
Kimball, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	----*	1,630	1,428	1,467	1,580	1,359	1,175
Pocahontas, Va. / Tazewell / Pocahontas	2,789	2,452	2,591	2,293	2,263	2,410	1,313

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
* Unincorporated, 1900. Source for Williamson figure: *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1900* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1900).
** Bluefield is not, strictly speaking, a coalfield town. Numbers are included for comparative purposes.

Table 2
Coalfield Towns with Jewish Populations of Ten or More, 1900-1920

Town / County / Coalfield	1900 Jewish Population	1910 Jewish Population	1920 Jewish Population
Pocahontas, Va. / Tazewell / Pocahontas	95	149	71
Davy, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	0	14	20
Keystone, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	110	147	72
Kimball, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	7	45	44
Northfork, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	0	33	70
Welch, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	9	31	98
Wilcoe, W. Va. / McDowell / Pocahontas	0	23	8
Beckley, W. Va. / Raleigh / New River	0	6	22
Mount Hope, W. Va. / Fayette / New River	2	0	19
Scarbro, W. Va. / Fayette / New River	0	13	16
Sewell, W. Va. / Fayette / New River	13	8	0
Matewan, W. Va. / Mingo / Thacker	0	10	19
Thacker, W. Va. / Mingo / Thacker	4	11	0
Williamson, W. Va. / Mingo / Thacker	4	28	69
Logan, W. Va. / Logan / Logan	0	7	40
Pineville, Ky. / Bell / Cumberland	10	20	39
Middlesboro, Ky. / Bell / regional	18	79	62

Derived from U.S. Census Bureau, manuscript census records. For method used to determine Jewish ethnicity see Chapter 2, note 33.
Not included: Towns that did not record ten or more Jewish residents between 1900 and 1920. Bluefield not included.

Jewish families eventually gravitated to the county seats, but this movement did not occur in a direct fashion. Their trajectory can be roughly depicted as follows (see Table 2): they started out concentrated in Pocahontas, Keystone, and Middlesboro (with some exceptions, notably the small and scattered early New River contingent). As their numbers grew they began to disperse throughout the coalfields, following the rail lines to locate not only in the county seats, but in other growing towns and villages. By 1910 coal towns such as Thacker and Matewan in Mingo County; Kimball, Davy, and Wilcoe in McDowell County; and Scarbro in Fayette County each had ten to fifty Jewish residents. By 1920 they had begun to re-concentrate, this time in the county seats, where Jewish populations ranged from less than thirty in Beckley to around one hundred in Welch. These numbers increased to around two hundred each in Williamson and Beckley in the late 1940s and one hundred each in Logan and Welch. Only in the Pocahontas coalfield did sizable numbers of Jews remain outside of the county seat: McDowell County towns such as Keystone, Northfork, and Kimball, as well as Pocahontas, Virginia, continued to maintain small Jewish communities. McDowell County prevailed as the major Jewish population center of the coalfields into the 1920s. Well over three hundred Jews lived in the county in 1920, far surpassing Bell County, Kentucky's one hundred Jewish residents (almost all in Middlesboro and Pineville) and the contingents of forty to ninety Jews who lived in other coalfield counties. But McDowell County's Jewish population would eventually be surpassed by that of Mingo and Raleigh counties, probably by the late 1920s.[63]

Powerful forces attracted Jews to the county seats: economic opportunities afforded by the rising populations of these towns, benefits derived from the centralization of commerce, and the prospect of participating in Jewish communal life as soon as a critical mass of Jews had gathered. Eventually, all four West Virginia county seats as well as one in Kentucky—Harlan—hosted

active Jewish congregations. Their memberships came not only from the towns in which they were based, but also from the scattering of Jewish families who continued to reside in smaller nearby towns as owners and operators of family businesses.[64] Several factors influenced the development of county seat Jewish contingents: the timing of each town's emergence as a coalfield center, the town's rail connections to sources of Jewish population within and outside the coalfields, the economic and demographic fortunes of each town in relation to the other towns, and overall trends in the region's economy. This final determinant enforced a certain similarity in the demographics of Jewish coalfield communities, as the towns and their Jewish populations rose and fell with the fortunes of the coal industry. Yet within the parameters set by the coal economy, the other factors led each community to take on a shape of its own.

The county seat towns along the Norfolk & Western main line developed earliest. In 1888 coal surveyor Isaiah Welch purchased land from a local farmer at the junction of the Tug Fork and Elkhorn Creek (around fifteen miles northwest of Keystone), an ideal town site. When the N&W reached it in 1891 his settlement had only ten houses. The following year the town of Welch captured the McDowell County seat, its court convening in a former saloon building. By 1900 the town had more than four hundred residents; by 1920, more than three thousand. Some sixty miles northwest along the Tug Fork, local farmer/entrepreneur Wallace Williamson acquired land from his relatives at a site that was "a corn field in 1891." He proceeded to develop a town, which the N&W reached in 1892 on its drive toward Ohio. As coal mining settlements sprouted throughout the area, he and other local leaders won the creation of Mingo County from the western part of Logan County in 1895 and the little town of Williamson became the new county's seat. Though unincorporated until 1905, the town grew quickly, with six hundred residents by 1900—and almost seven thousand by 1920. As a divisional rail headquarters, it

became the most prominent town within the southern West Virginia coalfields until superceded by Beckley in the 1930s.[65]

A handful of Jews settled in Williamson and Welch before the turn of the century. Lithuanian-born peddler Jacob Levine arrived in Williamson in 1896 and soon opened a dry goods store. In 1900, he and his wife Gertrude, their clerk and boarder Reuben Nathan, and H.B. Green (listed in the census as "a ginseng dealer") were the only Jews in town. But Levine was not the first Jew in Mingo County's Thacker coalfield: duplicating their pattern in the New River and Pocahontas fields, Jews first came to the area's booming coal towns rather than the county seat. As early as 1895 produce seller Louis Shein, butcher Louis Crigger, and dry goods merchant Isaac Weinstein lived in Thacker, an early mining settlement. The 1900 census reported ten Jews in Mingo County, and by 1910 the county had more than fifty Jews, with some thirty in Williamson and the rest mainly divided between Thacker and the independent coal town of Matewan. Williamson's Jewish population rose to around seventy by 1920, bolstered by an influx from Thacker, Matewan, and especially Keystone, which contributed at least seventeen people during the 1910s (including four Shores, two Banks, and seven Criggers). The Jewish population reached an estimated 130 by 1927; in 1936 the U.S. Census of Religious Bodies listed 135 Jews in Mingo County (by that time almost all lived in Williamson). The community's numbers peaked in the early 1950s at an estimated 180 people.[66]

The Welch Jewish community, like Williamson's, began shortly after the town was founded. Merchant tailor Josef Herzbrun and his wife Leina came from New York City in 1898, joining merchant William Sameth and his wife Lena. A third family arrived in 1900, Leina Herzbrun's sister and brother-in-law Pauline and Herman Josephy, also a tailor; all three families originated in Austria-Hungary. By 1910 Welch had seven Jewish households with thirty-one

people, a pittance compared to the Jewish population of nearby Keystone. Yet Welch soon passed Keystone as the Jewish center of McDowell County, as the number of Jews tripled to almost one hundred people in the next decade. Many moved to the county seat from neighboring coal towns, though Jews quitting Keystone tended to pass over Welch in favor of the more distant Williamson, probably drawn by better business prospects in the larger town. Eventually Williamson's Jewish population exceeded Welch's; McDowell County had an estimated 145 Jews in 1936 (with no separate listing for Welch), a considerable drop from the early 1920s; in 1955 an estimated seventy Jews lived in Welch and one hundred in the county.[67]

The Logan, Beckley, and Harlan Jewish communities formed after those in Williamson and Welch, mirroring the later development of the towns themselves. Both the C&O and N&W main lines had bypassed the Logan coalfield, delaying growth until a branch of the C&O penetrated Logan County around 1901, reaching Logan town in 1904. The town's population jumped from four hundred to sixteen hundred from 1900 to 1910 and continued to advance, its subsequent growth roughly comparable to that of Welch. The Raleigh County seat of Beckley followed close behind. Despite the C&O's early arrival into the New River Gorge, activity had focused on Fayette County in the northern section. Not until 1901 did rail lines enter Raleigh County in the southern section, reaching Beckley in 1906. The population exploded: the smallest of southern West Virginia's four future coalfield centers in 1900, Beckley was second in size only to Williamson by 1910 with more than two thousand residents. In the 1930s its numbers passed that of the Mingo County town and it emerged as one of the state's largest cities. Rail progress through eastern Kentucky came later still: a local railroad company began to build into Harlan County around 1908, and after being acquired by the L&N, finally reached the county seat, Mount Pleasant, in 1911. Within a year the town had a new name, Harlan, and within a decade its

population had quadrupled to some twenty-six hundred.[68]

The seeds of Logan's Jewish community were planted by 1910, when two Jewish families lived in town: tailor Jake and Anna Wells, three children, and Jake's brother Harry, also a tailor; and dry goods merchant Morris Max and his wife Olive. By 1916 there were seven families along with several unattached salesmen, and the population quickly grew from there. In 1920 Logan had some forty Jews in fifteen households and by 1927 that number had tripled to around 120 Jews in forty households. Many of the families who arrived during the decade came from McDowell County, especially Keystone and Northfork; others came from Cincinnati as well as New York and Baltimore. Logan's Jewish community reached its peak in the late 1920s: only an estimated eighty-three Jews lived in the county by 1936 and in the mid-1950s an estimated twenty-five Jewish families lived in Logan town. The late 1930s and 1940s saw many families move to Beckley as that town rose to prominence.[69]

The first recorded Jewish family in Beckley consisted of hotel proprietor Samuel Fisher, his wife Agnes, and their three children, the only Jews listed in the 1910 census. The Fishers had come from neighboring Fayette County where Sam had lived since 1901, starting out in Sewell and later clerking for merchant Ben Hurvitz in Mount Hope. Several other families arrived in Beckley during the 1910s, some from Fayette County and others from Baltimore. Among them were the Pickus brothers and Louis and Annie Fink, who promptly opened clothing and dry goods stores. Yet the Jewish population grew more slowly than Logan's; in 1920 there were only twenty-two Jews in seven households. From that modest beginning the number reached an estimated fifty-one by 1927, and after stagnating during the early Depression years, grew to around 140 in forty-seven households by 1940. By that time Beckley had become a major business and population center in the state, and it soon had the largest Jewish population in the

coalfields, estimated at 228 in the early 1950s. Jews arrived from both Logan and Welch in the 1930s and 1940s, both towns, by that time, considerably smaller than Beckley.[70]

Because of the relative inaccessibility of southeastern Kentucky to major Jewish population centers, only one eastern Kentucky coalfield county seat developed a significant Jewish population. By 1920 the growing town of Harlan had three Jewish households, all headed by Russian immigrants: dry goods merchant Philip Sachs, his wife Rebecca, and their four children; and merchants Samuel Michaelson and Ellis Wender. The Harlan County villages of Poor Fork (soon to be renamed Cumberland) and Evarts each had one Jewish merchant that year. By the 1930s, around sixty Jews lived in the county, with more than half in Harlan town and the remainder mostly in Evarts and Cumberland. Despite the impact of the Depression and the county's infamous labor troubles, Harlan managed to support a small business district that included clothing stores operated by Jimmy Ettin, Sol Geller, and Herman Lesser as well as department stores owned by the Sachs family and Alex Gergely. These merchants and their families formed the basis of a Jewish community that lasted into the 1960s.[71]

Communal activity began in each county seat once the population became large enough to support it. Welch, Williamson, and Logan Jews began organizing in the mid-1910s, Beckley in the early 1920s, Harlan in the early 1930s. The Welch and Williamson congregations built synagogues in the 1920s, Beckley in the 1930s, Logan in the 1940s. With the smallest population of all the county seats, the Harlan congregation never acquired its own synagogue but, like their Middlesboro counterparts, rented space in the local Masonic Hall. As in Middlesboro, the congregation depended on Jews from throughout the area: from other Harlan County towns and also from Hazard, Jenkins, and Barbourville, Kentucky; Appalachia, Norton, and Pennington Gap, Virginia; and LaFollette, Tennessee. (The Jewish population in those towns ranged from

one or two to an estimated eighteen in Hazard, nineteen in Appalachia, and fourteen in Norton in 1940.) See chapter 5 for a full discussion of Jewish communal life in the coalfields.

Jewish coalfield communities were sustained by the economic prosperity that county seat towns enjoyed in the first half of the twentieth century. Several "bust" periods occurred during those years that caused hardship and a temporary drop in the population, but lean times were much worse in the surrounding countryside than in the county seats. Although dependent on the coal economy, the towns were shielded from its most negative effects, aided by their relatively greater diversification (such as it was) compared to company-owned towns, their importance as regional centers, and the existence of a core of middle and upper-middle class merchants and professionals. And unlike Pocahontas, Keystone, and other independent towns where retail districts existed alongside coal operations, virtually no coal mining occurred within the confines of the county seats. As the director of Welch's chamber of commerce put it in 1924, "Welch is totally retail in its existence," though "nearby coal operations, numbering several hundred . . . give the city a commercial prosperity that cannot be underestimated." He was right to contrast the industrial-based environs with the commercial-based town and to stress the critical relationship between industrial activity and town prosperity. Yet the word "totally" was misleading, since in addition to lively commercial districts the county seats boasted railroad operations, government offices, churches, schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities.[72]

A booster spirit prevailed among county seat townspeople. The president of Williamson's chamber of commerce proclaimed his town "the busiest, best city for its size and age on earth" in 1924. The *West Virginia Review* that year noted that Williamson's "retail concerns are in the main housed in new, modern buildings and carry stocks of goods such as one would expect to

find in cities many times larger." Evidently wishing to avoid partiality, the journal also featured an article on Welch which quoted Jewish merchant Moses Hyman, who boasted that "Welch offers . . . as good an opportunity to succeed as any city in the country." While such hyperbole was typical of the era's small-town boosterism, the merchants' faith was no doubt reinforced by notably active and bustling downtown business districts. The hustle and bustle was enhanced by constant activity along the railroad (Williamson, for example, hosted eighteen passenger trains a day in the 1920s) and, above all, the topography of the towns. Hemmed in by looming mountains, virtually all available space became built up, with solid brick edifices constructed along narrow downtown streets and residential districts rising in layers on the hills above.[73]

On Saturdays shoppers flocked in from the countryside and county seat downtowns were packed with people. One Jewish merchant recalled that "the streets of Beckley were impossible to maneuver through" in the late 1930s and 1940s. The towns kept their booming atmosphere into the 1950s. In his memoir *October Sky*, Homer Hickam recalls the excitement of his family's weekly trips from tiny Coalwood to the nearest metropolis, seven miles away: "Welch was a bustling little commercial town set down by the Tug Fork River, its tilted streets filled with throngs of miners and their families come to shop. Women went from store to store with children in their arms or hanging from their hands, while their men, often still in mine coveralls and helmets, lagged behind to talk about mining and high school football with their fellows." Since most company towns contained no independent retailers —the company store being the only shopping option—Saturdays excursions to the local county seat became a standard feature throughout the coalfields, to the benefit of the towns' merchants.[74]

As in the boomtowns, Jews in the county seats were employed in providing consumer goods and services to their fellow coalfield residents. However, very few county seat Jews operated

saloons or liquor stores (only five saloonkeepers were identified, along with one liquor store owner and a few billiard parlor operators). Jewish businesses in the county seats were concentrated in clothing and dry goods, or, more grandly, department stores. But Jews also operated or worked in furniture, jewelry, grocery, and drug stores, pawnshops and consumer loan operations, cigar stores and butcher shops, restaurants, theaters, and hotels. They were junk dealers, real estate agents and developers, insurance agents, stenographers and office clerks. As the decades passed, a small contingent of Jewish professionals appeared, though they never approached the number of retail owners or workers.[75]

Unlike the boomtowns, the Jewish population probably never exceeded three percent of the total in any county seat town (and more likely hovered around one or two percent). Nevertheless, Jews played an important role in commercial life, establishing a significant presence in downtown business districts. They owned more than one-half of the clothing and department stores in Logan in 1927, at least half of the clothing stores in Beckley in 1940, and 60 percent of the clothing, furniture, jewelry, and department stores in Williamson in 1952. On the Jewish high holidays, recalled one Logan merchant, "a good bit of the town was closed up."[76]

Geographic Trends and an Ethnic Economic Niche

In her study of the Jews of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Ewa Morawska found that her subjects had two major goals: to ensure the economic well-being of their families and to foster "a good Jewish environment to live in and raise children." The Jews of the southern coalfields shared these priorities. The dream of peddlers was to settle down and open a store—and many achieved their dream by settling in commercial hubs where families could also gather to create Jewish communities. Yet the two goals could come in conflict. Shifting economic conditions meant that

financial success often depended on geographic mobility. As a descendant succinctly put it, "you go where you can make a living." For people who had already shown a willingness to travel great distances in search of opportunity—first across the Atlantic and then from U.S. cities to the mountains—migrating within the coalfields must have seemed natural.[77]

A constant coming and going therefore characterized the communities, as individuals and families moved around in search of the right situation. After peddling in Maryland and then operating a clothing store in Keystone, Jacob Berman transferred his stock to a new store in Matewan, where he did "a fine business" until relocating to nearby Williamson. Sam Abrams came from Brooklyn to Scarbro to work for his Lopinsky cousins, then moved his family to nearby Oak Hill to start his own business. Later the family relocated once more, this time to Beckley, where they remained thanks to the success of Abrams's department store. Such stories are common throughout the coalfields, with three, four, even five or six moves within a short period not uncommon. For many families they had the same ending—a final move to a county seat town—but for some, the movement did not stop there. Dozens of people moved from a county seat town to different coalfield town (usually, but not always, another county seat), while others eventually left the coalfields altogether. This transience was not unusual: Jews shared the restlessness of the region's coal miners, who moved from coal camp to coal camp also searching for the right situation. In both cases, the migrations were not random; rather, they reflected the ongoing development of the region.[78]

Yet even as the movement of Jews from boomtowns to county seats reveals the trajectories of these towns, patterns of persistence may also be discerned, with certain families remaining in the same town for twenty years or more—even in the boomtowns. Typically, the original founders of Jewish communities remained, with many (but not all) of their children or

grandchildren moving away. Often one or two members of the second generation stayed to take over the family business. Such patterns of transience and persistence are reflected in the larger American Jewish experience. As historian William Toll notes, Jewish peddlers "were accustomed to continual migration. . . . Nevertheless, their persistence rates in specific towns were high compared with gentiles, in some cases even when compared with gentile merchants. Their propensity to remain in town rose dramatically with advancing age, which produced marriage and family, property holdings and accumulated wealth."[79]

Such persistence in the face of strong migratory tendencies, coupled with the creation of communal institutions, provided the cement that held Jewish coalfield communities together. Again, they were not unique. For many immigrant groups, geographic mobility complicated, but did not preclude, the establishment of strong communities. Caroline Golab, for example, refers to the phenomenon of "community creation in the midst of hypermobility" among (non-Jewish) Polish immigrants in Philadelphia. Certainly, people who managed to make it across the ocean with group associations intact (if altered) were not going to easily lose them during their wanderings around America.[80]

This impulse toward continuity amidst rapid change was perhaps the most salient factor guiding the economic behavior of coalfield Jews. Networks and occupational patterns extending back to the old country shaped their choices about what type of work to pursue and where to pursue it. As a result, they ended up filling the same kind of niche Jews had occupied in Eastern Europe: as "middlemen" playing a commercial role in a rural setting. Just as Jews in the East European countryside had little involvement in the predominant activity of farming, Jews in the coalfields had little involvement in the coal industry. And, as in the old country, though they stayed tied to a single economic sector, their activities within that sector were highly diverse.

All immigrant groups rely on pre-migration resources and networks in their new environment. Coalfield Jews were certainly not the only Jewish immigrants in the U.S. to use these resources to forge a special niche in the local economy, as members of small American Jewish communities from the industrial North to the rural South and the frontier West did the same thing. While circumstances in New York and other major metropolitan areas led Jews to rely on their previous experience as skilled workers and to join the ranks of the garment industry proletariat, those who journeyed to smaller cities and towns found conditions that enabled them to draw instead on their commercial background.[81]

As a result, small Jewish communities developed differently not only from their big-city Jewish counterparts, but from most of the ethnic groups around them. When the local economy was dominated by a single activity pursued by most members of the working population—whether coal mining, steel manufacture, gold mining, or farming—Jews tended to play a commercial role supporting the dominant industry without participating in it to any great extent. Even in diversified economies the Jewish work experience departed from that of other groups. Historian Joel Perlmann observes that in Providence, Rhode Island, "the Russian-Jewish concentration in small business . . . was highly atypical of the city's workforce," and even Jews who pursued manual work "tended to enter different industries than the members of other groups did." In most places, the Jewish economic profile resulted from a combination of discrimination and "Jewish self-selection," as Perlmann puts it.[82]

That the Jewish economic role in the coalfields conformed to a national pattern provides evidence that casts doubt on the concept of Appalachian exceptionalism: the theory that Appalachia developed in an anomalous fashion to the rest of the nation (with the anomaly often attributed to the cultural peculiarities of the local population). On the contrary, for Jewish

immigrants whose ancestors had for centuries served as "middlemen" in European economies, the Central Appalachian coalfields provided one of many regions in the U.S. where they could attempt to duplicate that role. One seeming difference between coalfield Jewish communities and many other small merchant-based American Jewish communities—their Eastern European, rather than German origin—can be attributed to the late entry of railroads into the mountains, which postponed development to a time when most German Jews were already settled in America and had little need to strike out for newly-developing areas of opportunity. But even this distinction was not exceptional. As Lee Shai Weissbach notes, East European Jews founded many small town Jewish communities in the South around the turn of the century. The East European makeup of Jewish coalfield communities, therefore, simply confirms what historians of Appalachia have recently pointed out: the timing of Appalachian development (along with the existence of vast natural resources of considerable value to the rest of the nation), rather than exceptional behavior on the part of its population, shaped the history of the region.[83]

In the context of coalfield development, local Jewish communities could be said to have filled a niche within a niche: their networks supplied consumer goods and services to the region, which was busy playing out its role of supplying coal and timber to the nation. Ironically, occupying their traditional old country position as traders enable coalfield Jews to Americanize quickly, as they became absorbed into the local socioeconomic structure and emerged as middle class boosters with an intense if ambivalent relationship to the area's dominant economic power. The following chapters will explore in greater detail the Jewish economic niche in the coalfields, as well as the social and communal ramifications of that role.

Notes to Chapter 2

---

[1] Lester S. Levy, *Jacob Epstein* (Baltimore: Maran Press, 1978), 15.

[2] Gail Bank, phone interview with author, 28 September and 4 October 1998 (first quote); Levy, *Jacob Epstein*; Baltimore Bargain House postcard, Baltimore Bargain House collection (Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore) (second quote). The Baltimore Bargain House crops up in many accounts of small-town American Jewish life. In *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 81, Eli Evans writes that his grandfather in North Carolina "ordered his assortment from the Baltimore Bargain House like all the peddlers." Other examples include "Jewish Heritage of the Winchester Community" (Winchester, Va., Folder, Small Collections, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati); Wendy Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

[3] Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 185.

[4] There is no denying the economic development of Central Appalachia was entirely export-driven. Yet those who imported goods into the mountains deserve attention. Lewis Atherton makes this point about American frontier histories, which typically neglect the merchant: "If the story of the frontier is to be told solely in terms of occupations like those of the cowboy and the farmer, the process of transforming the raw settlements into modern specialized communities will remain incompletely understood." *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 14.

[5] Gail Bank interview; Kenneth Bank, interview with author, Baltimore, 6 November 1998; Sylvan and Elaine Bank, phone interview with author, 4 March 1998; Harry Berman, interview with John C. Hennen, Jr., Williamson, W.Va., 15 and 28 June 1989, Matewan Oral History Project, Matewan Development Center, Matewan, W.Va.; Manuel Pickus, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 18 May 1998; Reva Totz Hecker, interview with author, Baltimore, 5 November 1998; Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, interview with author, Parkersburg, W.Va., 18 December 1997; Fannie Golden Overholt, in Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963), 1013.

[6] Sylvan Bank interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 986; Lewis Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-bellum South," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19, no. 1 (February 1945), 41-43; Lu Ann Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce in the Rural New South," *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 2 (May 2000): 297-320.

[7] Altina Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 44; Louis Schmier, "Hellooo! Peddlerman! Hellooo!," in *Ethnic Minorities in Gulf Coast Society*, ed. J.H. Shofner and L.V. Ellsworth (Pensacola: 1979); Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce"; David Kasdan, "The History and Memoirs of My Life" (Biographies File, American Jewish Archives); Elizabeth Jane Dietz, "As We Lived A Long Time Ago," *Goldenseal* (Fall 1981), 16 (quote); Ronda G. Semrau, "Roxie Gore: Looking Back in Logan County," *Goldenseal* (Summer 1990): 23-28.

[8] Levy, *Jacob Epstein*, 17; "Weinstein Brothers," *Middlesborough News*, March 21, 1903, p. 1; Sylvan Bank interview.

[9] Sam and Harvey Weiner, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 8 November 1996; "Weinstein Brothers." On Cincinnati, Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994), 116; on Knoxville, Besmann, *A Separate Circle*.

[10] Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998), 53. Another revealing description of the operation of informal Jewish business networks can be found in Elliott Ashkenazi's *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988).

[11] Barkai, *Branching Out*, 46. On how the concept of *tzedekah* and the performance of *mitzvot* translated into Jewish business practice, see Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 20-21, 58-61.

[12] A variety of sources was used to construct a database of more than two thousand Jewish residents of the coalfields, with information on occupation gathered for more than nine hundred. Peddlers were identified primarily through interviews and census records. U.S. Census Bureau Manuscript Census Schedules for 1900, 1910, and 1920 were examined for the following counties: Bell and Harlan, Ky.; Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Raleigh, W.Va.; Tazewell and Wise, Va. Peddlers were probably undercounted in the census more than other workers because of their transience.

[13] Evans, *The Provincials*; Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[14] Bernard Gottlieb, interview with author, Clarksburg, W.Va., 5 November 1996; Weiner interview.

[15] Isadore Scott, phone interview with author, 14 December 1997; Sidney Fink, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 12 October 1996; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1910.

[16] Ken Bank interview; "I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It," *Every Friday*, 23 September, 1949.

[17] "I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It"; Pickus interview. Several interviewees offered perspectives on the experiences of women who came to the region as a result of marriage.

[18] Milton Koslow, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 13 May 1998; Ira Sopher, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Beckley, W.Va., 31 May 1996; Abraham I. Shinedling and Manuel Pickus, *The History of the Beckley Jewish Community* (Beckley, W.Va.: Biggs-Johnston-Withrow, 1955); Isadore Gorsetman, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 13 May 1998.

[19] Melvin Sturm, phone interview with author, 4 October 1998.

[20] Marilou S. Sniderman, *Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee* (NP: 1963); Betty Gottlieb interview; Rose Marino, *Welch and Its People* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Press, 1985).

[21] Charles Kenneth Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979); Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930*

(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1969).

[22] Irving Alexander, "Wilcoe: People of a Coal Town" and "Jewish Merchants in the Coalfields," *Goldenseal* 16 (Spring 1990): 28-35; Scott interview; "Col. Jos. M. Lopinsky," *McDowell Recorder*, December 12, 1913, 1; Sniderman, *Diamond in the Rough.* A good example of the concern with *takhlis* comes from one interviewee's frequent repetition of a single phrase to explain why her father chose to quit his job as a clerk to take up the much more difficult life of a peddler: "He couldn't see any future" working in the store. Jean Abrams Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996.

[23] Diner, *A Time for Gathering*; Barkai, *Branching Out*; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Deborah R. Weiner, "The Jews of Clarksburg: Community Adaptation and Survival, 1900-1960," *West Virginia History* 54 (1995): 59-77; Herrman Schuricht, *History of the German Element in Virginia* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1977 [1900]); "Jewish Heritage of the Winchester [Va.] Community"; Fannie B. Strauss, "The Jewish Community in Staunton," *Augusta Historical Bulletin* 8 (Spring 1972): 20-27; Besmann, *A Separate Circle*; Simon Meyer, *One Hundred Years: An Anthology of Charleston Jewry* (Charleston, W.Va.: Jones Printing Co., 1972).

[24] *Routes and Resorts of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway* (Richmond: Chesapeake & Ohio Railway, 1878), 4-5, 26; Jerry Bruce Thomas, "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1971); Randall G. Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis: Industrializing Society on the Central Appalachian Plateau, 1860-1913," (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983). The railway also opened up the Kanawha coalfield near Charleston; the figure cited includes both fields. In the Kanawha field, a Jewish population formed in the western Fayette County town of Montgomery and grew to around eighty people by 1920. It always considered itself part of the nearby Charleston Jewish community and is not included in this study. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1046-1056.

[25] Ron Lane and Ted Schempf, *Sewell: A New River Community* (Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1985), 2-3, 7-8.

[26] Fayette County Manuscript Census, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920; Kanawha County Manuscript Census, 1870, 1900; Logan County Manuscript Census, 1920; *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1895, 1900, 1910, 1914 (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co.); *Logan City Directory 1927* (NP); "Charles Midleburg," *Progressive West Virginians*, 1923; Weiner interview.

[27] Fayette County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; "Col. Jos. M. Lopinsky"; *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1895, 1898, 1900, 1904, 1910, 1914; Eugene L. Scott, "Thurmond on New River," *West Virginia Review* 23 (March 1946): 22; Wein interview; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*.

[28] Lane and Schempf, *Sewell: A New River Community*, 29; Thomas, "Coal Country," 63-71; Jim Woods, *Raleigh County, West Virginia* (Beckley, W.Va.: Raleigh County Historical Society, 1994).

[29] The term "frontier" has gone through many shifts in meaning through the years. In world history, the term has been used to describe the borderlands between different (often hostile) national-cultural groups. (In this sense, Jews in the Russian Pale may be said to have lived for centuries on the frontier between eastern and western Europe.) Its most widely-held American connotation, both in popular culture and in

historiography extending back to Frederick Jackson Turner, has been as the site where advancing white "civilization" encounters and subdues a wild natural landscape and the "primitive" native people who occupy it. This association of "frontier" with "exploration, settlement, and progress" by white men has led some American historians, especially practitioners of the "new western history," to reject the term altogether for its ethnocentric (and racist) implications. However, others have suggested that the term be "reconfigured" to retain its powerful meaning as a site of contestation and accommodation among different cultures, in the context of national expansion. Stephen Aron offers the following definition: "lands where separate polities converged and competed, and where distinct cultures collided and occasionally coincided" during the process of "conquest, colonization, and capitalist consolidation."

Although, of course, late nineteenth century Appalachia was not undergoing "conquest" of the Indians or "colonization" by European settlers (events which had occurred a century earlier), it was certainly in the throes of "capitalist consolidation," since that final stage had not yet been completely realized—the mountainous landscape had not yet been "subdued." Therefore it exhibited many of the qualities associated with advancing frontiers, from the in-migration of diverse groups of people in search of opportunity, to the integration of local markets, land, and resources into the capitalist system.

Aron, "Lessons in Conquest: Towards a Greater Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 63 (1994): 125-147 (quotes 126, 128). See also Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1999), particularly Gilman's introduction, "The Frontier as a Model for Jewish History," 1-25. Quote in text is from Paul Salstrom, "Newer Appalachia as One of America's Last Frontiers," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 76-102 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[30] On boomtowns and commercial centers in Central Appalachia's timber fields, see Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*. On frontier conditions and the creation of boomtowns in the coalfields, see John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

[31] Scott, "Thurmond on New River," 12, 22; Ken Sullivan, *Thurmond: A New River Community* (NP: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1989), 35-36; Melody Bragg, *Thurmond: Dodge City of the East* (NP), 20; Walter R. Thurmond, "The Town of Thurmond, 1884-1961" (West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.).

Ironically, the notorious activities attributed to Thurmond took place outside the town limits, on a strip of land known as "Southside," just across the river from the town's business district. Southside belonged to the neighboring town of Glen Jean, whose main district was located several miles away and high above the river, thus leading to the confusion. Schaffer actually served as mayor of Glen Jean, a town controlled by the McKell family, whose local coal empire encompassed much of the surrounding area (though not the town of Thurmond itself, founded by the straitlaced and continuously infuriated Thurmond family).

[32] Thomas, "Coal Country," 76; Joseph T. Lambie, *From Mine to Market* (New York: New York University Press, 1954); *The Virginias* 4 (January 1883), 3. The extent of the N&W's involvement in coal land development is hinted at in this dry quote from its 1902 annual report: "The Pocahontas Coal and Coke Company having purchased approximately 295,000 acres of the lands in the Pocahontas Field, your Directors deemed it necessary for the protection of the interests of your Company to purchase all the

capital stock of the Pocahontas Coal and Coke Company . . . ." *Norfolk & Western Railway Company Sixth Annual Report* (Philadelphia: N&W, 1902), 11. In 1958, Kyle McCormick reported that the N&W, "through its holding company," owned about one-third of the land in McDowell County. "McDowell County Celebrates its Centennial," *West Virginia History* 19 (April 1958): 202-208 (quote, 202).

[33] Tazewell County Deed Index, 1876-1908; Tazewell County Deed Book 19, p. 67 (quote); *Bluefield City Directory 1915-1916* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1914) (includes Pocahontas); Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1920.

[34] Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; "News of Pocahontas: Reminiscences Early Days," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, March 6, 1924; Tazewell County Deed Book 24, p. 272.

[35] Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1900; Tazewell County Deed Index, 1876-1908; Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983), 114; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 367, 382-383.

[36] Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1900, 1910; *American Jewish Year Book* 20 (1918-1919), 342; U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population, 1910*.

A note on identifying Jewish individuals: Census records do not gather information on religion. However, they do indicate place of birth, parents' place of birth, and native language. (In the case of some Jews—though a minority—census takers listed "Yiddish" as the native language.) To determine who was Jewish, data on birthplace and language were used in conjunction with other indicators. A typically-Jewish last name combined with a typically-Jewish first name, along with employment in a traditionally Jewish occupation, comprise one set of indicators. Also, Shinedling's *West Virginia Jewry*, Marino's *Welch and Its People*, Shinedling and Pickus's *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, interviews with Jews from the region, and records of congregations in Bluefield, Williamson, Welch, and Logan, W.Va., and Harlan, Ky. (American Jewish Archives) revealed the religious/ethnic affiliation of hundreds of people (most of the Pocahontas families ended up on the rolls of the Bluefield congregation, for example). The numbers are counts of actual people, not projections. Therefore they are conservative estimates, undoubtedly low; individuals who did not show up in the sources are not included.

[37] Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas*; William C. Pendleton, *History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia, 1748-1920* (Richmond: W.C. Hill Printing Company, 1920), 664-665.

[38] Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; *Kitts' City and Coalfield Directory 1904* (Bluefield, W.Va.: City Directory Co., 1904); *Bluefield City Directory 1910-1911, 1915-1916*; Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas*.

[39] Thomas, "Coal Country," 75 (Lathrop quote); Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas*, 71; Tazewell County Manuscript Census, 1910.

[40] *McDowell Times*, May 15, 1914; *Bluefield City Directory 1915-1916*. This directory reveals that several Keystone saloon owners had recently moved their businesses to Pocahontas. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas*; *Centennial Review and Souvenir Program of Mercer County* (Bluefield, W.Va.: Mercer County Centennial Association, 1937); U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population, 1900*.

[41] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 363-365; Mercer County Manuscript Census, 1900; *Bluefield City Directory 1919-1920* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1919).

Bluefield Jews founded Congregation Ahavath Shalom in 1904 and built their first synagogue in 1907. The congregation drew its members from the Mercer County seat of Princeton as well as Bluefield (the Princeton Jewish community began around 1907 and grew to fifteen to twenty families by the 1940s). Because Bluefield is situated ten miles beyond the coalfields, its Jewish community is not part of this study. However, the regional importance of the city and the ties between its Jewish community and Jews within the coalfields will be cause for further consideration. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[42] U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population, 1880*; Mack Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field of Southern West Virginia, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972); George Byrne, ed., *Handbook of West Virginia, 1915* (Charleston: Lovett Printing Company, 1915), 88.

[43] Gail Bank, Ken Bank interviews; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*. Rail timetables courtesy of Gail Bank and the National Railway Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.

[44] Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements"; Mrs. Samuel Solins and Mrs. Paul W. Jones, *McDowell County History* (Fort Worth, Texas: University Supply, 1959); Matthew Serel, "A Brief History of Keystone, West Virginia," 1988 (West Virginia and Regional History Collection); McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900; U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population, 1900.*

[45] Gail Bank interview; Nancy Brant, phone interview with author, October 1998; *McDowell Recorder*, August 1922; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 25, 40; *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1895, 1898; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 986; McDowell County Manuscript Census 1900-1920.

[46] Suberman, *The Jew Store*.

[47] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 983-988 (quote, 986); McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900; gravestones, "Hebrew Mountain" cemetery.

[48] Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day, or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia* (NP, 1912); Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*; Jean Battlo, "Cinder Bottom: A Coalfields Red-Light District," *Goldenseal* 20 (Summer 1994): 60-65 (second quote, 60).

[49] *McDowell Times*, 1913-1918; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*; Joe William Trotter Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

[50] *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1898, 1904, 1910, 1914; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920.

[51] *McDowell Times*, 1913-1918; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1910, 1920; Ken Bank interview.

[52] Betty Ofsa Rosen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., 28 May 1996; Berman, Sylvan Bank, Hecker interviews.

[53] Koslow interview; Edward Eiland, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 19 May 1998; Christine Carr McGuire, phone interview with author, November 1998; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Marino, *Welch and Its People*; Manuscript Census, McDowell, Mingo, Logan Counties, 1920. The records of the Logan, Welch, and Williamson congregations list many former Keystoners as members.

[54] Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Kincaid Herr, *The Louisville & Nashville Railroad* (Louisville: L&N Railroad, 1964); *Bell County, Kentucky, History* (Paducah: Bell County Historical Society, 1994); U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population, 1890*.

[55] Herr, *Louisville & Nashville Railroad* (first quote, 96); "Middlesboro As She Stands Today," *Middlesborough News*, October 4, 1902 (second quote), 1; Lou DeRosett and Joe Marcum, *Middlesboro at One Hundred, 1890-1990* (Middlesboro: Middlesboro Centennial Commission, 1990); Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*; Sturm interview. From the "Middlesboro History" column, *Middlesboro Daily News*, January 20, 1990: "In 1894, Receivers Club is organized for all the businesses and businessmen who have gone into receivership (bankruptcy)." In 1929 Middlesboro again experienced a precipitous downfall caused by a physical disaster followed by financial calamity: a massive flood struck the business district, and shortly thereafter the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began.

[56] "New Furniture Store," *Middlesborough News*, May 12, 1900; Ann Matheny (author of "Middlesboro History" column), letter to David Weinstein, January 11, 1990, personal collection of David Weinstein family; DeRosett and Marcum, *Middlesboro at One Hundred, 1890-1990*; "Middlesboro History" column, *Middlesboro Daily News*, February 22, 1990.

There are several possible reasons why Jewish merchants might have been more willing to gamble on Middlesboro's recovery than others who came to enjoy the boom. Perhaps these immigrants had less to lose than other entrepreneurs who gravitated to the town. And, as will be discussed in chapter 3, Jews may have been able to tolerate a higher degree of financial uncertainty than others, since Jewish businesses in both Europe and America had traditionally existed under conditions of instability and marginality. Also, some of newcomers present at the town's founding were young Englishmen from wealthy families who were perhaps more interested in adventure than in serious business.

[57] Bell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; *Bell County, Kentucky, History,* 376.

[58] Herr, *Louisville & Nashville Railroad*; Sorin, *A Time for Building*, 137; Besmann, *A Separate Circle*.

[59] "Jewish Cemetery, Middlesboro, Kentucky" (Middlesboro, Ky., Folder, Small Collections, American Jewish Archives); "Student Rabbi Questionnaire, 1935-1936" (Hebrew Union College Collection, American Jewish Archives); Sturm interview; *Bell County, Kentucky, History,* 261; Herr, *Louisville & Nashville Railroad*; Bell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920.

[60] Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements"; Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis"; Herr, *Louisville & Nashville Railroad*; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*.

[61] In *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*, Ron Lewis offers an analysis of the "county seat wars" that pitted industrial interests against agrarian interests (the industrialists almost always won out). Mary Beth Pudup discusses how eastern Kentucky county seats grew from sleepy towns to industrial centers in

"Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," *Appalachia in the Making*, 270-296. McCormick, "McDowell County Celebrates its Centennial" (quote, 206).

[62] U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population*, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930; Logan Centennial Association, *Centennial Program, City of Logan, West Virginia, 1852-1952* (Logan, W.Va.: Logan Centennial Association, 1952); Woods, *Raleigh County, West Virginia*; Herr, *Louisville & Nashville Railroad*.

[63] Manuscript Census, 1900-1920, for Bell County, Ky.; Tazewell County, Va.; Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, Raleigh Counties, W.Va.; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[64] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Harlan congregation records.

[65] Houston Kermit Hunter, "The Story of McDowell County," *West Virginia Review* 17, no. 7 (April, 1940): 165-169; Solins and Jones, *McDowell County History;* McCormick, "McDowell County Celebrates its Centennial"; W.S. Rosenheim, "Williamson: In the Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field," *West Virginia Review* 2 (October 1924), 20 (quote); *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1900; Nancy Sue Smith, *An Early History of Mingo County, West Virginia* (Williamson, W.Va.: Self-published, 1960); Manuscript Census, McDowell and Mingo Counties, 1900-1920.

[66] "Student Rabbi Questionnaire, 1935-1936"; Mingo County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1895; U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Religious Bodies*, 1936. The U.S. Census of Religious Bodies was based on congregation membership; unaffiliated Jews were not recorded. The 1927 and 1950 estimates (Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*) also were based on congregation affiliation.

[67] Thomas C. Hatcher and Geneva Steele, eds., *The Heritage of McDowell County, West Virginia, 1858-1995* (War, W.Va.: McDowell County Historical Society, 1995), 27; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; *U.S. Census of Religious Bodies*, 1936; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[68] William R. Sparkmon, *The Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in West Virginia* (Charleston, W.Va.: Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society, 1983); Woods, *Raleigh County, West Virginia*; Herr, *Louisville & Nashville Railroad*; U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population,* 1900-1950.

[69] Logan County Manuscript Census, 1910, 1920; Edward Coffman, letter to Prof. Kaufmann Kohler, September 18, 1916 (Hebrew Union College Collection); *Logan City Directory 1927*; *U.S. Census of Religious Bodies*, 1936; Shinedling, *West Virginia History*; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*.

[70] Raleigh County Manuscript Census, 1910, 1920; Fayette County Law Order Book 9, p. 272; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Pickus, Fink interviews; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; *Beckley City Directory 1940* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1940).

[71] Manuscript Census, Harlan County, 1920; Harlan congregation records; "Jewish Communities of the United States," *American Jewish Year Book, 1940*, 246, 263; William D. Forester, *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties* (NP, 1986).

[72] A. P. Flood, "Welch, The City of Friendship," *West Virginia Review* 1 (June 1924), 17; "Logan—A Big Little City," *West Virginia Review* 2 (November 1924): 52-59; *Williamson, West Virginia: Heart of*

the Billion Dollar Coal Field (Williamson, W.Va.: Williamson Chamber of Commerce, 1931); *Beckley City Directory 1932* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1932).

[73] Rosenheim, "Williamson: In the Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field," 20; Flood, "Welch, The City of Friendship," 17.

[74] Fink interview; Homer H. Hickam Jr., *October Sky* (New York: Dell, 1999), 10.

[75] *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1910, 1914; Manuscript Census, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, Raleigh Counties, 1910, 1920; *Logan City Directory 1927*; *Beckley City Directory 1932, 1940*; *Williamson City Directory 1952* (Chillicothe, Ohio: Mullin-Kille Co. and *Williamson Daily News*, 1952); Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Marino, *Welch and Its People*. Courthouse records, interviews, and newspapers also provided information on Jewish occupations in county seat towns.

[76] Manuscript Census, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, Raleigh Counties, 1910, 1920; *Logan City Directory 1927*; *Beckley City Directory 1940*; *Williamson City Directory 1952*; Weiner interview.

[77] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 135; Rosen interview.

[78] Berman, Wein interviews; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Marino, *Welch and Its People*; manuscript census records; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*.

[79] Marino, *Welch and Its People*; *Bell County, Kentucky, History*; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; congregational records; William Toll, "The 'New Social History' and Recent Jewish Historical Writing," *American Jewish History*, 325-341 (quote, 334).

[80] Lee Shai Weissbach, "Stability and Mobility in the Small Jewish Community: Examples from Kentucky History," *American Jewish History* 79 (Spring 1990): 355-375; Caroline Golab, *Immigrant Destinations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), 143.

[81] John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) and *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); Golab, *Immigrant Destinations*; Barkai, *Branching Out*; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*; Robert E. Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York: Ktav, 1978); Joel Perlmann, "Beyond New York: The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I. and Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-1915," *American Jewish History* 72 (March 1983): 369-394.

[82] Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization*; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*; Perlmann, "Beyond New York," 384.

[83] Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262; Dwight B. Billings, Mary Beth Pudup, and Altina Waller, "Taking Exception with Exceptionalism: The Emergence and Transformation of Historical Studies of Appalachia," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 1-24. On the importance of timing in Appalachian development see also in the same volume, Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, "Agriculture and Poverty in the Kentucky Mountains: Beech Creek, 1850-1910," 233-269.

Chapter 3

Middlemen of the Coalfields: Jewish Economic Life

Esther Sherman Scott came to Poor Fork, Kentucky, with her two-year-old son around 1911, straight from her small Ukrainian hometown. Her first reaction was, to put it mildly, disappointment. After traveling all the way across the ocean she had landed in a place even less refined than a shtetl. Upon seeing her husband David's store, she commented, "In Europe, they keep their cows in a better place." Her brother Mike, a Baltimore businessman with wholesale connections, had sent his greenhorn brother-in-law David Scott (not to be confused with the McDowell County, West Virginia, Jewish merchant with the same name) to the region almost three years earlier and had financed the business. Mike Sherman did not have the same impact on Jewish coalfield communities as Jacob Epstein of the Baltimore Bargain House, but he did his part: blessed with five sisters, as each one married he dispatched the newlywed couple to a different town in the southeastern Kentucky coalfields. For decades, the Middlesboro and Harlan congregations would be full of Sherman family members who came in from the surrounding area for the Jewish holidays.[1]

Sherman's inadvertent success as a community builder was not matched by his business prowess. Though many of his relatives stayed in the region, according to Esther Scott's daughter, "everything they did with my uncle flopped." The Scotts eventually prospered after acquiring their own store in the Bell County seat of Pineville. David Scott brought members of his own extended family over from Europe, and they too found a place as merchants in the southeastern Kentucky coalfields.[2]

By comparing Poor Fork to a Ukrainian shtetl, Esther Scott was in some ways not so far off

the mark. As in the East European countryside, Jewish communities in the southern coalfields owed their existence to their ability to maintain an economic niche providing goods and services to a rural population. Family job connections, business failures, the achievement of an often-tenuous prosperity—elements common not only to the Shermans and Scotts, but to Jewish coalfield life in general—determined how (or if) their communities developed. Meanwhile, as in the old country, the commercial activities of Jews had an impact on the surrounding society and shaped relations with non-Jews. Economic life therefore stands at the center of the Jewish coalfield experience, with far-reaching implications for Jewish communal organization and the position of Jewish families in the local social structure. This chapter describes how Jews developed and sustained their mercantile position within a coal-based economy. It details the challenges they confronted and their strategies for surmounting them. It examines the interaction between Jewish retailers and the region's dominant industry, and explores how Jewish networks helped transform a locally-based agricultural society into a rural-industrial society with ever-increasing links to national markets. Finally, taking a cue from Esther Scott, it places the economic role of Jews in the coalfields within a national and international context.

Profile of an Ethnic Economic Niche

Many factors merged to encourage coalfield Jewish immigrants to enter into trade. Above all, Jewish networks provided jobs, credit, and guidance while the coalfields provided opportunity in the form of a commercial gap that needed to be filled. Beyond this, young immigrants who lacked capital or even actual experience in trade could draw on family resources that were cultural if not financial. European Jews came to the U.S. embedded in a culture molded by generations of experience with commercial life, including a close acquaintance with

economic marginality and instability: what historian Walter Zenner has called a "heritage of small business." This legacy nurtured traits that included not only a desire for self-employment—the impetus that brought many Jews to the region—but such intangible characteristics as economic adaptability, a high tolerance for financial risk taking, familiarity with business insecurity and failure, and ability to start a business on a shoestring. Such qualities would prove invaluable under the volatile conditions of the coal economy.[3]

Moreover, other groups in the coalfields proved ready and able to accept Jews in their traditional economic role—while not necessarily willing to accept them as participants in the coal industry. The coal boom gathered people from all over the world, from mountain farm families to black sharecroppers to immigrants from across Europe and the Middle East. As later chapters will discuss, multicultural cooperation marked coalfield ethnic relations to a surprising degree. Yet, people brought to the region's coal camps and commercial centers their preconceived notions and prejudices about others, as well as their varying skills, experiences, and goals. These factors combined to create an ethnic division of labor within both the coal industry and the larger economy. Members of the region's ethnic groups (including "native whites") found that perceptions about their particular group caused them to be shunted toward certain segments of the occupational structure by local coal operators—who had the most power to determine such things—as well as by popular consensus. One non-Jewish woman from Pocahontas, Virginia, recalled the division of labor in her town: the Welsh were the mine bosses and engineers, blacks worked in the coke ovens, Hungarians and other Eastern Europeans mined the coal, Italians built the buildings, and the Jews were "purely business people."[4]

The widespread belief that Jews were "unfit" for manual labor—a charge that followed them to the U.S. from Europe—played at least a small part in keeping them out of the coal

mines. Meanwhile, the classic image of the Jewish petty trader helped them gain acceptance as peddlers and storekeepers. As historian Elliott Ashkenazi writes about Jewish merchants in nineteenth century Louisiana, "So long as they . . . relied on their distinct characteristics as a minority to offer economic services not readily obtainable from others, they occupied a traditional place with respect to the majority and were accepted on that basis." Stereotypes about Jews therefore had both positive and negative economic consequences. One Jewish man who grew up in the coalfields recalled that while Jews were readily appreciated as merchants, they were not necessarily accepted in other roles. Yet some Jewish entrepreneurs were happy to take advantage of prevailing notions. The slogan of the Liebman brothers of McDowell County, West Virginia, proudly confirmed that they were "tailors from the cradle."[5]

The Jewish retail niche was clearly molded more by "self-selection" than by discrimination in other sectors of the economy. Jews had their place alongside other groups in the coalfields' ethnic division of labor, but the circumstances of their entry into the region had allowed them somewhat more agency than others in acquiring that place. They had arrived via their own networks, not through recruitment by coal companies, and this initial independence from the industry would continue to set them apart. They remained linked to their networks for access to jobs and business opportunities, with few drawn into mining: of Jews who worked in the coalfields from the 1870s to the 1950s, less than 4 percent could be found who had a direct connection to the coal industry at some point in their lives. Considering how coal so completely dominated the region's economy, this remarkable statistic attests to the strength of the bonds keeping their ethnic economic niche intact.[6]

The word "virtually" is used above because there was one other group that played a predominantly mercantile role. Middle Eastern immigrants (especially Lebanese and Syrians)

carved out a retail niche using the same kind of ethnic and kin-based economic networks that Jews maintained. They too passed on their commercial occupations to succeeding generations. Like Jews, they tended to remain uninvolved in the coal industry, although there were more Arab than Jewish exceptions to this rule. And they too got their start as peddlers before opening stores in county seat towns such as Beckley, Williamson, and Logan, West Virginia.[7]

The peddler-to-merchant paradigm provides a major theme in studies about small town American Jewish communities. It occupies central place in a saga that takes Jews from the European countryside to the American interior, where they struggled, then prospered, then saw their small communities succumb to changing economic and cultural patterns in the latter half of the twentieth century. The coalfield Jewish experience reflected these trends. The first Jews to journey to the region were peddlers (with some exceptions) and many of these early arrivals did indeed settle down, open stores, and prosper. The merchant-based communities they created lasted for several generations, with most giving way to the socioeconomic transformations of the post-World War II era.[8]

But their story really stands as one of numerous variations on the theme, with many distinguishing features. Historians of antebellum southern Jewry, for example, depict more of a classic "middleman minority" situation, with immigrant German Jewish peddlers and merchants filling the "status gap" between planters and the rural poor, both white and black. Their descriptions frequently draw on the images of European feudalism. Eli Evans writes that "immigrant Jews saw the gap . . . no merchants or tailors or cobblers between the genteel aristocrats" and the "groveling poor whites . . . the few freedmen and the slaves." Elliott Ashkenazi observes that "Jews filled a void in the feudal South, as they had in many other

settings around the world, through their minority status and their nonconformist religious and commercial practices."[9]

In contrast, the "gap" that existed in the coalfields came about not through the dictates of a caste structure in a semi-feudalistic economy but through the sudden explosion of industrial capitalism, with a burgeoning workforce creating a market for retail goods that the small local merchant class could not fill.[10] Despite their commercial niche, coalfield Jews cannot be described as a prototypical "middleman minority." They did not stand out as the sole "foreign" element in society. They were not the only people who performed distributive functions for the economic system or who occupied the middle position between the mass of people and the ruling elite. They did not really "recreate" their old country role, but rather drew on resources derived from that role to find a place in the coal economy.

The diverse circumstances that greeted immigrant Jewish entrepreneurs led to distinct differences in how each retail niche developed. In the hierarchical social system of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, dominated by an old stock commercial-industrial elite, East European Jews found a place serving their former old country customers, Hungarians and Slavs, who made up a large portion of the local coal and steel industry workforce. Together, writes Ewa Morawska, these marginalized outsiders formed a "(multi)ethnic economic enclave" within the larger Johnstown economy. In the post-Civil War South, East European Jewish retailers built a similar niche-within-a-niche by relying on blacks and poor whites for their customer base—partly because these under-served groups made up the bulk of the population, but also because Jewish immigrants recognized that they were in no position, economically or socially, to compete with the established merchant elite for the small but lucrative middle and upper class market.[11]

Jews in the coalfields did not find themselves at a competitive disadvantage with the few

pre-existing members of the region's local merchant class. They had no need to develop a sub-niche serving black or East European workers—although a familiarity with their former old country neighbors did provide a boost for their businesses, as will be seen. Their situation was more like that of the merchant-based Jewish communities in the boomtowns of the mid-nineteenth century American West, where Jews participated, along with many other groups, in a dynamic and expanding economic order. In turn, the coalfield reliance on resource extraction as the primary engine of growth differentiated the experience of coalfield Jewish communities from many of their western counterparts. (In those parts of the West where resource extraction was a major factor, similarities were perhaps the greatest.) The commingling of Jewish agency and coalfield reality resulted in an economic profile that remained well within the American Jewish pattern even as it retained its own particular character.[12]

In analyzing that economic profile, a look at the jobs held by coalfield Jewish residents reveals just how thorough their retail orientation was. Occupational data were collected for 950 Jews who lived in the southern West Virginia, southeastern Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia coalfields from the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries. Of 1,145 jobs held by these men and women at some time in their lives, 986 consisted of peddling, owning a retail establishment, or working for a retail establishment as manager, salesperson, tailor, bartender, bookkeeper, or clerk. Thus 86 percent of the jobs held by Jews in the sample involved retailing (see Table 3). In actuality, the percentage of jobs in retailing was probably even higher than that, because wives and children often worked in the family store and the data reflects only a portion of their activity.[13]

Table 3
Coalfield Jewish Economic Profile / Job Types (Sample: 950 Employed People)

Job Type	Number of Jobs (by Type of Job)	Percent of Total Jobs	Percent of Employed People (950)
Total Jobs *	**1,145**	**100**	**120***
Retail:	**986**	**86**	**86***
Proprietor	543	47	57
Retail Employee	413	36	43
Peddler	30	3	3
Non-Retail:	**159**	**14**	**16***
Professional	54	5	6
Blue Collar	30	3	3
Kept Boarders	39	3	4
Miscellaneous Non-Retail	36	3	4

* Most people in the sample held more than one job during their years in the region. This survey counts the job *types* held by each person, not each separate job. For example, a person who worked as a clerk at three different stores, and then owned two different businesses, is counted once as retail employee and once as proprietor. In total, 821 people held at least one retail job (many held more than that) and 156 people held at least one non-retail job. So, 86 percent of the 950 individuals held retail jobs and 16 percent held non-retail jobs. Because some people held both retail and non-retail jobs, the combined percentage exceeds 100 percent.

Explanation of Job Types:

Proprietor: Owned or co-owned a business that offered goods or services to the general public.
Retail Employee: Worked for a retail business in a managerial, sales, or office role.
Peddler: Itinerant trader who sold goods directly to the public.
Professional: Includes lawyers, doctors, dentists, nurses, teachers, social workers, public accountants, engineers.
Blue Collar: Includes coal miners, laborers, teamsters, carpenters, plumbers, janitors, butchers, bakers (non-owners).
Kept Boarders: Performed household duties for paying guests.
Miscellaneous Non-Retail: Includes coal industry owner/managers, white collar employees of non-retail businesses (bookkeepers, stenographers, radio announcers, telephone operators, hospital technicians, etc.) government clerks, farmer.

Source: See note 13.

When the analysis moves from retail jobs to all jobs linked to Jewish networks, a related but not exactly identical category, the percentage becomes higher still. Of the 159 non-retailing jobs, fifty-four were nevertheless connected to Jewish businesses: thirty-nine involved wives taking in boarders (mostly young, single Jewish men working as clerks in the family business) and fifteen consisted of blue collar jobs for Jewish-owned concerns. So, only 105 of the 1,145 jobs were unrelated to Jewish businesses (or 9 percent), while 91 percent of the total jobs revolved around Jewish networks. Further, of the 102 people who held those non-Jewish-related jobs, at least twenty-seven also had jobs linked to the Jewish community. Only seventy-five people in the

sample showed no connection to Jewish businesses, or barely 8 percent of the total number of individuals with jobs. And as stated above, many of these people probably did have that link through working in a family business, though the sources did not reveal it.

Yet, although Jews concentrated in a single sector of the economy, their activities within that sector reveal patterns of diversity as well as basic consistencies. The mainstay of Jewish retail activity was the clothing and dry goods business, which occupied 64 percent of retail jobholders in the sample at some point in their lives—55 percent of all Jewish jobholders. But the major opportunity in the early years of the coal boom revolved around the sale of alcohol in boomtowns such as Keystone, West Virginia, and Pocahontas, Virginia. Over a quarter of people in the sample who worked in the region before prohibition had at least one job as a saloonist, liquor dealer, or bartender. The liquor trade virtually disappeared as a business option for Jews after it became illegal in the mid 1910s, and it did not recapture their attention after prohibition ended in the 1930s. By that time other types of businesses had emerged. Through the years, Jews owned furniture, jewelry, grocery, hardware, and drug stores. They were butchers, bakers, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, and junk dealers. They operated hotels and pawnshops, theaters and billiard parlors and restaurants. They sold insurance and real estate. As one Jewish man who grew up in the region put it, "they did anything to make a living." Anything, that is, that involved offering goods and services to the general public.[14]

The existence of Jewish distribution networks in some of these lines of business encouraged Jews to enter into them, but—as the rise and fall of their participation in the liquor trade shows—their retail niche also evolved in response to changing conditions in the region. Their economic profile at first was weighted toward peddlers, saloonists, and owner-operators of small general stores or clothing stores. Over the next couple of decades commerce became centralized in the

county seats. Competition among the merchants who gathered in these hubs, along with an expanding local market for goods and services, encouraged specialization and the development of new lines of business. By 1914 Jewish merchants in Logan, Williamson, and Welch, West Virginia, had opened vaudeville houses; by 1927, Logan even had a Jewish-owned piano store. Meanwhile, possibilities to specialize within the clothing and dry goods trade kept many people occupied: from general stores and small clothing shops came department stores, army-navy stores, credit clothing stores, men's and ladies' boutiques, discount or "underselling" stores, and children's clothing stores—to name just a few. Peddlers, clerks, and tailors became merchants who employed more clerks and tailors. The retailers who achieved the most success branched out into residential and commercial real estate. On the whole, Jews took advantage of upswings in the coal economy to move into a heterogeneous array of businesses.

Changing conditions also shaped the Jewish retail niche in less beneficial ways. Downturns in the coal industry, and especially the economic disaster of the Great Depression, caused numerous Jewish-owned businesses to disappear and others to contract or take on new form. For example, leading southern West Virginia merchant Harry Bank lost department stores in Kimball and War in the early 1930s. He moved to Welch and opened an army-navy store, which he operated under much-reduced circumstances. Interestingly, the Depression saw the return of peddlers, as some young entrepreneurs resorted to this economical way to sell—though now they traveled by car, filling their vehicles with goods and making the rounds of the coal camps. Through the years, technological innovation filtering in from beyond the region brought both opportunity and adversity to Jewish coalfield merchants: moving picture houses, appliance stores, and automobile-related businesses made their appearance when the time was right, while businesses whose offerings became outmoded had to adapt or fold (the vaudeville houses

became movie theaters). In the post-World War II era, new technology in the form of shopping malls and chain stores would help to destroy the Jewish economic niche altogether.[15]

Along with changing coalfield realities, internal dynamics affected the economic profile of Jewish communities. Eli Evans's often-quoted pronouncement that "the story of Jews in the South is the story of fathers who built businesses to give to their sons who didn't want them" began to apply to coalfield Jews by the 1930s and became increasingly relevant in the generation that came of age around World War II. Many young people whose family businesses had enabled them to receive a college education opted for professional careers both in and out of the region. Within the coalfields, only eight Jews in the occupational sample held professional jobs before 1920—six teachers, a lawyer, and a doctor. These numbers remained small until a professional cohort emerged with the addition of at least forty people from the 1930s to the 1950s, mostly doctors, dentists, and lawyers. Fifteen of these new coalfield professionals were sons and daughters of local business people while the remainder came from outside the region.[16]

To revise Eli Evans's story by adding the half of the population that he omitted, it must be noted that coalfield Jewish businesses were often family operations, built by mothers as well as fathers—though in most (but not all) cases men had the primary role. Some female entrepreneurs started their own businesses; more commonly, women partnered with their husbands or inherited businesses as widows and daughters. So at least a few daughters, as well as sons, found themselves faced with the choice of whether or not to follow in their parents' footsteps. Ethel Catzen Cohen, for example, took on the management of her father Aaron Catzen's considerable Northfork, West Virginia, business and real estate interests upon his death in 1951. But women did have a different economic profile than men. For one thing, up to around 1920, taking in boarders constituted an important money-earning activity for them. The generational shift toward

professional careers can be seen with women as well as men, though they tended to become teachers while men tended to become doctors and lawyers (with exceptions on both sides). Women's economic activities will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter.[17]

Even after a professional cohort developed, its small size compared to the numbers who continued to find employment in commerce reveals an enduring interest among coalfield Jews in maintaining their retail occupations, Evans's statement notwithstanding. As late as 1974, a study of Williamson Jews commented that "Their occupational involvements seem characteristic of an earlier era, when enterprises were small or at least family-owned. Moreover, [they] are . . . satisfied with the economic order and the place they occupy in it." However, the limited amount of professional opportunities played a role here; most Jews who grew up in the region moved elsewhere if they wanted to pursue such careers. In fact, it is not possible to separate internal motivations and personal goals from economic and societal forces. The maintenance of a Jewish retail niche resulted from a blending of these factors.[18]

During the boom times, the bustling environment and evident opportunities predisposed young adults to remain and follow their parents into the family business. The inclination to inherit the retail mantle was reinforced by the appearance of new Jewish arrivals attracted by an expanding economy. So despite the decision of some members of the younger generation to depart in order to achieve career goals outside of small town merchantry, a promising economic outlook enabled Jewish communities to continue to thrive. In turn, a lively communal scene helped to overcome the other significant personal and cultural factor that tempted some people to leave: the desire to live in a more Jewish environment. As long as Jewish families continued to move into the region, Jewish life seemed secure and attrition caused by this propensity did not

have a major impact. Conversely, adverse economic conditions both augmented and exacerbated the personal considerations that led people to move away. The Depression caused many young people to conclude that the life of a coalfield merchant was not for them. Ken Bank saw his father Wolf's business interests shrivel to almost nothing just before the McDowell County patriarch died in 1931; as a result, after the funeral Bank decided "to get the hell out of the coalfield." That same year, the members of B'nai El in Logan expressed worries about their "fast depleting congregation." The community managed to limp along until economic recovery brought its numbers back up in the late 1930s.[19]

The following decade saw new challenges. Many young Jews who had grown up in the coalfields experienced life beyond the mountains while serving in the armed forces during World War II, and a significant number opted not to return. They were helped by the GI Bill of Rights and lessening anti-Jewish discrimination in the wider corporate and professional worlds, which opened opportunities outside the region that had not previously existed. Nevertheless, the coalfield Jewish retail niche remained quite healthy from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, as vitality returned to the local economic and social scene. Jewish residents fondly recall that "it was a pleasure to shop down[town] then," as masses of shoppers and a plethora of stores lent an air of excitement to county seat towns. The re-energized local economy encouraged a spate of in-migration that reinvigorated Jewish communal life as well. Ten years after fretting about their dwindling congregation, Logan Jewish leaders were making plans to build a synagogue. Unfortunately, by the time their building was completed in 1948, the pendulum was just about to swing back the other way. [20]

Starting in the mid 1950s, forces converged that caused the steady and permanent decline of the Jewish retail niche. Above all, coal industry mechanization transformed Central Appalachia's

economy. In the five southern West Virginia counties included in this study, the mining workforce dropped 70 percent between 1950 and 1970. With few other employment alternatives, most of the region's inhabitants faced the choice of moving away or sinking into poverty. Those five counties saw a 38 percent population decline over the two decades; in eastern Kentucky, the population dropped by one-third between 1950 and 1960 alone. Local businesses suffered as their customer base dwindled; in 1961 the *New York Times* noted that the loss of purchasing power from massive coal industry layoffs was having "predictable effects on local stores" in southern West Virginia. Referring to the machine responsible for destroying the most jobs, one Logan man succinctly summed up the situation: "you can't sell a continuous miner clothes and food." Next came the nationwide transformation of retail shopping, as malls and chain stores devastated downtown business districts throughout small town America.[21]

These blows decimated coalfield retailing and in turn dissipated the "critical mass" holding Jewish communities together. Even people who might have been able to maintain their businesses saw the viability of Jewish life disappearing; for some, that became an overriding consideration. Moreover, many of the Jewish settlers who had arrived in the region during the booming 1910s began to reach retirement age, making the decision to close out the family business relatively easy. (The Williamson Jewish merchants surveyed in 1974, although satisfied with their own economic position, did not expect their children to follow in their footsteps.) This convergence of factors meant that, in even higher percentages than the rest of the population, coalfield Jews became part of the larger Central Appalachian diaspora. Only in those county seat towns that managed to diversify their economy somewhat did Jewish communities hang on past the 1970s—now dependent not so much on retailing, as on newly-emerging professional opportunities at hospitals, governmental facilities, and the like. (In Williamson, for example,

some Jewish doctors came to town with the opening of a UMWA-sponsored hospital in the mid-1950s, while in Beckley, Jewish doctors arrived to work at the VA Hospital.)[22]

The story of the Fink family of Beckley dramatizes how economic forces and personal goals came together to shape generational trends. In the 1920s, Russian immigrant Louis Fink built up a successful retail business that was battered but not destroyed by the Depression. His son Sidney went off to college for one year but then came back home to work in the family business, which, he stated, he "learned to love, and fared extremely well." He became a partner by 1940, during a flourishing time in the coalfields. "I always took to the fashion business and enjoyed it," he recalled. "I prospered to the extent that I could send my two boys to a prep school and my daughter likewise." One son returned from college to take over the business in the 1970s, but then, observed Fink, "began the exodus from downtown U.S.A. to the malls." The family recognized the difficulties and closed out their stores. Both of Fink's sons became professionals, while his daughter decided to pursue a retail career—though not in Beckley.[23]

Life Within the Coal Economy

The extreme nature of the region's economic swings can be attributed to one factor: coal. Complete dependence on an industry prone to wild fluctuations meant that national trends such as recession and wartime expansion had an exaggerated effect on the coalfields. Meanwhile, developments within the industry itself—such as mechanization, labor disputes resulting in strikes or lockouts, rising and falling national energy prices—reverberated powerfully through the local economy and affected the entire population. As one Jewish coalfield native explained, with the air of someone merely stating the obvious, "everybody was dependent on the coal companies." Longtime residents were well aware that the fate of their small Jewish communities

hinged on conditions in the coal industry. Retail businesses closed with each recession or strike, opened with each major jump in the world's demand for coal. A retired Beckley merchant observed, "it was a changing atmosphere, all the time," with families coming and going as stores opened and closed. Yet on the whole, he stated, "Beckley was a very good business town."[24]

Other county seat Jewish merchants echoed his phrasing: well into the 1950s their towns had the reputation of being "good business towns" where commerce was lively and prospects were generally good. Looking back on decades of Jewish retailing, they maintained that families who persevered in the region and weathered the downturns eventually prospered. A Williamson merchant summed up their attitude when she asserted that "the people who stayed had thriving businesses here. . . . Everybody made money here. Everybody did well." And to Jewish merchants, along with nearly everyone else, it seemed self-evident that the ultimate source of economic prosperity was—coal. As prominent Logan Jewish merchant Rudy Eiland wrote in his contribution to a 1952 town centennial booklet, "Quite naturally, as the coal business prospered, so did the merchants in general and the city of Logan in particular."[25]

But in reality, the coal economy contained highly *un*natural features which presented significant challenges for retailers who functioned within its parameters. Its boom-and-bust nature led to frequent layoffs while its propensity for labor turmoil made strikes bitter and lengthy. For merchants, these events translated into a customer base that was often unemployed, if not destitute. As a Jewish woman who grew up in a retailing family observed, "strikes were disastrous for business." Relating how a coal operator in the New River field shut down his mines for a year rather than allow workers to unionize, a Jewish man whose family had owned a small store summed up, "we went broke." The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* emphasized the direct relationship between slowdowns in coal production and small business failures in 1915,

reporting that "small businessmen had hard sledding at the beginning of the year [because of] bad conditions in the coal fields." Sixty-nine bankruptcy petitions had been filed in McDowell, Mercer, and Mingo counties, and the article's headline highlighted the marginal nature of these firms: "None Failed with Big Wad." Even during periods of sustained employment, cutthroat competition in the national coal market led coal operators to enforce the lowest possible labor costs, resulting in a generally low wage workforce whose purchasing power was limited.[26]

Meanwhile, the original dearth of merchants in the mountains had propelled coal companies into the retail business themselves: before an adequate retail sector developed, they needed to provide a place where their employees could obtain basic goods and services. What started as a necessity soon turned into a profitable sideline, and company stores most certainly did not fade away after independent merchants appeared on the scene. With the power coal companies wielded over their workers as well as their control over the local socioeconomic and political systems, their competition with other retailers could hardly be described as fair. Although many county seat merchants did not see themselves in direct competition with company stores, the practices of these ubiquitous coalfield establishments—and in particular, the use of scrip—distorted the retail picture throughout the region, as the discussion below will explore.[27]

At first glance this portrait of harsh coalfield economic realities, well-documented by historians, seems at odds with the glowing narrative of success recounted by Jewish business owners. How could merchants have prospered under such difficult conditions? Generalizations on both sides give way to complexities when a close look is taken at the impact of the region's coal dependency on local commerce. Not all Jewish merchants prospered, as the interviewees tacitly acknowledge: the "people who stayed" achieved economic mobility (to varying degrees, as will be seen), but there were plenty who did not—could not—remain in the region and

maintain viable businesses. The retail niche remained small and, at times, overcrowded; the coal economy would allow it to expand only so much. And those who did stay endured a history of ups and downs that gave coalfield retailing the character of a wild roller coaster ride.

On the other hand, for many decades the coal industry did support a sizable wage-earning population that provided a ready market for goods and services. As a retired Jewish merchant commented, "*everybody* wasn't poor." His simple phrase served as both an explanation for retail viability and a commentary on the oversimplified image of the region. Boom times, when, as he put it, "everything was going great guns," offered merchants the opportunity to make up for down times. Coalfield newspapers trumpeted the success enjoyed by local businesses during such periods—though sometimes they took on a wistful tone: another 1915 article, this time welcoming the region's latest economic recovery (courtesy of wartime Europe's heightened demand for coal), concluded, "if it only will continue for awhile . . ." Moreover, not all coal miners "owed their soul to the company store" and not all coal companies took a hostile stance toward their retail competitors. The factors militating against an independent retail niche, though considerable, were not completely unyielding. There was some room for maneuvering—and Jewish entrepreneurs, accustomed to economic marginality and possessed of resources of their own, were perhaps better-equipped to do so than others.[28]

A certain amount of controversy has swirled around the role of the coal company store. Many historians have depicted it as a key tool used by coal operators to exploit their workers. The picture, broadly painted, goes as follows. Coal companies undertook to monopolize the trade of their employees. They compelled miners to shop at the company store by threatening to fire them or place them in the least productive areas of the mine (miners were paid by the ton) if they

shopped elsewhere. They then charged "exorbitant" prices and further ensnared workers through the use of scrip: coal company currency that could be drawn in advance of payday and could be used only in the company store. When payday came around, miners could find themselves with a negative balance, forced into debt peonage—or, at best, would receive very little pay since most of their earnings had already been spent. Either way, they were then obliged to draw more scrip to meet their expenses, which bound them further to the company store and to the company as employer. Revisionists have challenged this picture, portraying the company store as a benign institution that provided convenience, quality products, and reasonable prices to miners and their families. Scrip, they maintain, was a special service that, if used judiciously, offered flexibility in family budgeting and shopping. They insist that coal operators did not force their employees to use the company store, that very few miners became indebted to the company, and that company-owned stores, far from being monopolistic, faced "stiff competition" from independent merchants, mail order houses, and stores owned by other local coal companies.[29]

Only by ignoring mounds of evidence can revisionists sustain claims that the company store operated in "a competitive market situation" and that coal operators generally abstained from using coercive tactics. Numerous sources, from contemporary newspapers to oral histories to the coal industry's own trade journals, document attempts by coal operators to drive out independent retailers and to pressure employees into trading at the company store.[30] However, the evils of the company store have been exaggerated by its harshest critics. It did indeed provide essential retail services in relatively remote areas, while serving as the community center and focal point for coal town life. Moreover, as the very existence of an independent retail sector suggests, its "monopoly power" was limited. Nevertheless, the company store as a dominant coalfield institution imposed an inequitable and restrictive set of conditions that miners and their families

(as employees and as consumers) and local merchants (as competitors) were forced to confront. The tension between its monopolistic tendencies and the response of these consumers and competitors helped shape the coalfield retail economy.[31]

Coal companies pressured their employees to use the company store with strategies ranging from subtle to heavy-handed, with the more egregious tactics applied in the early years before unionization reduced their control over their workers. A New River coalfield resident recalled that at one local mine, "before the unions got so strong, if you worked there, you spent your money there. If they caught you spending your money uptown, they'd either lay you off or put you in a water hole—you couldn't make a living." Employers freely acknowledged such policies to outsiders and amongst themselves, though they vehemently denied them in government hearings. A 1915 letter in the trade journal *Coal Age* conceded that "all mine officials are expected to make their men realize, in some subtle but effective way, that the man who spends most at the company store will receive more favors than the one who buys elsewhere." In the early 1920s, a coal operator told journalist Winthrop Lane that "he had formerly discharged men 'for buying two dollars' worth of flour somewhere else'," though Lane reported that miners were no longer "compelled to trade at company stores." Perhaps not overtly, but in the early 1930s a company bookkeeper slyly informed researcher James Laing, "We wouldn't fire a man for not trading at the store—but he could be let out for something else."[32]

Not all coal companies attempted to coerce their employees, while those who did didn't always succeed. As revisionists point out, the tight labor market that sometimes pertained in the region curbed their ability to dictate to their workforce: if miners were dissatisfied, they could easily quit and move elsewhere. One operator told Lane that competition for good workers led his company to attempt to keep its men "contented and satisfied." A 1915 *Coal Age* letter writer

expressed the same view more candidly: "Now about this store-profit business. . . . If I abused my workmen any more than any [other] coal operator does, my men would leave me." Some operators professed indifference as to where their workers spent their pay. A former company store manager in the New River field recalled that his firm's miners often purchased groceries at a nearby independent store. "They thought they could get 'em cheaper than they could in the company store. . . . It was all right. It didn't hurt us any." Meanwhile, some miners and their families refused to submit to pressure. A woman who grew up in a southern West Virginia coal camp in the 1920s recalled that her mother "declined to shop at the company store, and when the store manager tried to pressure her, she told him she would shop where she pleased."[33]

Evidence from independent retailers suggests that the coercive policies of company stores hampered their businesses but did not necessarily prevent them from operating. A storekeeper in eastern Kentucky in the 1920s asserted that a local mine superintendent tried to keep miners from trading with him: "He'd tell them it might mean their job if they didn't patronize the company store." They ignored the threat and shopped at both stores. Some Jewish residents interviewed for this study expressed the view that miners were required to spend a portion, but not all, of their earnings at the company store. One man stated that miners who were paid twice per month spent their first paycheck at the company store and came to town to shop with their second paycheck.[34]

Yet, even if coercive policies were unevenly or halfheartedly applied, the relationship between coal companies and miners gave company stores an inherent edge over independents. Author John Hevener, comparing three different mines in 1930s Harlan County, noted that one did not apply any pressure at all while at another, the superintendent "bluntly told his employees: 'If you trade at Piggly Wiggly's you can get your job at Piggly Wiggly's'." The third company

"sent its miners a letter that they interpreted as a warning" to trade at the company store or be fired. Indeed, the line between coercion and aggressive marketing could be fuzzy, as the U.S. Coal Commission noted in its 1922 study. Though miners were "no longer . . . openly" forced to shop at the company store,

> The energetic store manager desires to show good profits at the end of the year. . . . He has access to the mine company's pay roll and can find out which families do none or but part of their buying at his store. If he solicits the trade of these families . . . he is doing no more than any wide awake merchant would do. Yet he is exposing himself and his company to the charge of "forcing purchasing."

The coalfields' independent "wide awake merchants," of course, had no such access to their customers' payroll records and no such targeted opportunities to "solicit" trade.[35]

A 1913 *Coal Age* article delineated other advantages company stores enjoyed over independent retailers: they "pay no rent, do no advertising, should have no losses on bad credits and have small delivery charges, all of which cost usually from 8 to 10 percent of the gross profit." A 1915 article asserted that some operators faced "fierce" competition from independent stores, "and they frequently succeed so well . . . that they take away the bulk of the business from the local merchants, owing to the fact that they have a large trade absolutely secured from bad debts and of a volume which can be relied on." Access to the financial resources of their large parent corporations enabled them to carry a larger (and by most accounts, higher quality) stock than small family-owned businesses. Their ability to buy in large quantities allowed company stores to undersell competitors if they so chose. At least one company applied this strategy somewhat selectively. In 1909, a general store owner in Bramwell, West Virginia, complained in a letter to the governor that the Caswell Creek Coal Company was "soliciting business from this town, and selling goods, at ruinous prices" in order "to choke off the small local merchant." The

prices the company offered townspeople for order and delivery of goods were far lower than the prices it charged its workers in its store, the letter claimed.[36]

Their proximity to the bulk of the coalfield population gave company stores their most obvious advantage over independents. In 1922, for example, more than 80 percent of West Virginia's miners and their families lived in company towns. The Coal Commission found that in the New River district, representative of the coalfields as a whole, the company-owned store served as "the most important source of supplies." And in "newly-developing" areas where no other stores yet existed, it was "still a necessary institution." Until improvements in the road system and the spread of automobile ownership starting in the 1930s, company stores did indeed have a "virtual monopoly" (as Winthrop Lane put it) in the newer or more remote coal camps.[37]

Some coal companies were determined to protect this geographical supremacy. A 1911 U.S. Immigration Commission study observed that "in most instances the companies own large tracts of land and keep out competitors very largely." Many coal operators refused to allow independent stores on their property and also banned peddlers from their camps. An article about Beckley Lebanese merchant Asaff Rahall notes that during his peddling days in the 1910s, "a lot of times the company police would try to chase him out of the houses." In the early 1920s, West Virginia's labor commissioner told Winthrop Lane that "in nearly every case hucksters and peddlers are prohibited" from coal camps. Yet this statement must have been an exaggeration, since peddlers such as Rahall managed to earn enough income to move into the less precarious role of coalfield shopkeeper. While some companies enforced strict "no trespassing" rules, others were clearly more lax. A Harlan County local historian writes that peddlers, mostly Jews and Assyrians, "sold in all the communities and the coal camps" in the 1920s and 1930s. "They were not welcome in some coal camps," he states, "but they did well and prospered."[38]

Despite the dominance of the region's coal companies, there were limits to their power to keep independent retailers out of their territory. Rudy Eiland operated a small grocery store just outside of Logan town and made deliveries into nearby coal camps in the 1910s. Company officials "weren't happy about his coming," stated his son, but they could not stop him because he had purchased the land on which his store sat. In 1915, Superior Pocahontas Coal Company superintendent George Wolfe sued a local firm, McNeal & Goodson, for trespassing when the firm attempted to deliver goods to miners in one of his McDowell County coal camps. To close off access to the camp he also constructed a barrier across a public road used by rural residents traveling to and from the town of Davy. His actions aroused the wrath of local townspeople and farmers. A scathing editorial in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* charged that Superior was clearly attempting to prevent employees from trading with local merchants. "In this free country, a suit of this kind causes considerable wonder," the newspaper fumed. "It is just such foolish actions as this that cause agitation and labor troubles." Wolfe maintained that his miners could "trade where they please" and that he was merely attempting to "keep outside teams" from interfering with mining operations. But, as the newspaper pointed out, his protestations rang hollow since "the company in its bill [stated] that it is deprived of profit by the merchants and their employees using the streets and roadways." Wolfe himself explained to his employer Justus Collins that "net earnings on our store will fall from Eleven Thousand to Six Thousand Dollars per year" if he allowed deliveries from independent merchants. In a rare court defeat for local coal operators, Wolfe's suit was dismissed and his firm was ordered to pay all court costs.[39]

However, the incident should not be used to conclude that public opinion routinely prevented coal companies from getting away with such behavior. For years Wolfe had enforced a policy barring independent retailers from company property. In 1913 he had noted in a letter to

Collins, "About once a year I have a round with these merchants at Davy, as there seems to be always some new one that has to be broken in." Several of the Davy merchants were in fact Jewish immigrants, newcomers unlikely to challenge their powerful neighbor. Only after McNeal & Goodson (a non-Jewish firm) began to ignore the rule did Wolfe bring his lawsuit. By resorting to the courts rather than relying on his usual methods of intimidation, he apparently overreached his considerable authority and raised the specter of bad publicity, as Collins pointed out when he wrote Wolfe, "you can see what a club you have . . . placed in the hands of the enemies of the coal industry." Collins, himself a strong believer in authoritarian rule, recognized that "the Company's stores have every advantage in many ways" and thus there was no need for "coercion in any shape or form," which needlessly aroused the antagonism of miners and townspeople alike. He preferred to save heavy-handed tactics for keeping out "undesirable people . . . during strike times."[40]

Collins's instincts were correct. While public opinion may have become unsettled over blatant attacks on local businesses and the manipulation of miners as consumers, coal companies could conduct their campaigns against unionism virtually unchecked. Conveniently, their no-holds-barred anti-union measures also had the effect—intended or not—of restricting interaction between their retail competitors and their workers. When Jewish immigrant James Pickus, newly arrived from Russia, entered one coal camp to post signs advertising his brothers' Beckley store in the mid-1910s, he was attacked and badly beaten by a mine guard. The incident left "a real deep scar" on his forehead, according to his son. This company's officials cared little about competition from independent retailers, or so they said; Pickus had been mistaken for a union organizer. Routine inquisitions carried out by coal industry watchdogs extended to any and all suspicious persons and must have had somewhat of a chilling effect on trade. A 1920 Baldwin-

Felts Detective Agency memo reported that one Keystone-based agency spy "has failed to locate any Union organizer or come in contact with any agitator, notwithstanding the fact that he has investigated dozens of miners . . . picture agents, peddlers, insurance agents, newspaper collectors, and others."[41]

Though efforts to monitor and regulate daily life in their towns arose from their obsessive desire to stamp out unionism, coal operators recognized the additional benefits derived from their social control methods, and many came to view these benefits as their prerogative. Some coal towns developed into veritable armed camps, and labor organizers were not the only undesirables deliberately barred. George Wolfe described admiringly the arrangement of a fellow coal operator in a 1915 letter to Collins:

> Bradley has a five-strand barbed wire fence, ten feet high, around his property, with only one gate and at that gate he keeps someone day and night. He is surrounded by the Union. Works absolutely non-union and controls the situation and people come for miles to work for him. His net profits on the store are 12 percent and there are no outside teams delivering anything on his job.

Local authorities, operating as an adjunct to the coal industry, joined in the repressive measures that stifled commerce as well as union activity. A traveling salesman told a reporter in 1920, "Every operation has its armed guard—usually two. I was served with a little notice by a deputy sheriff in Logan . . . to not go up Island Creek any more, that it was dangerous and I was liable to get shot. . . . The notice forbade me using the railroad going up there and back."[42]

As historian Ken Sullivan has emphasized, coal towns "varied enormously" in their physical make-up and their policies. It would be difficult to ascertain how many Bradleys and Wolfes there were, compared to how many operators who did not insist on the exclusive right to supply

their workers' consumer needs. Some mining officials saw local retailers as pesky interlopers who interfered with the region's sole purpose: to serve the coal industry (and their own profits in particular). In contrast, others saw them as junior partners in the region's development, fellow capitalists who could be enlisted as middle class allies in building a social and economic order that placed the coal industry at the forefront, but also had room for the more diversified enterprises that typically sustained small town life.[43]

Some coal companies actively promoted local commerce and worked cooperatively with merchants. Most of the independent towns that sprang up in the region did so because land companies and/or their coal subsidiaries sold chunks of property to real estate developers (or created real estate companies of their own) with the goal of encouraging ancillary business and residential districts that would exist side-by-side with their coal operations. Middlesboro, Pocahontas, and West Virginia towns such as Keystone, Northfork, and Kimball all got their start in this fashion. In Pocahontas, the coalfield's first leading coal company sold off land in the top half of the town and maintained ownership of the bottom half. Deed records show that it sold several town lots to Jewish merchants before 1900. The company's power plant supplied power to all local businesses and its store, located on the main downtown street, engaged in friendly competition with the independent stores ranged alongside it. (Not coincidentally, unlike other company stores, it did not have the reputation of charging inordinately high prices.) In these independent towns, coal company managers joined merchants as town boosters and public officials. The massive U.S. Coal & Coke Company in McDowell County offers another model of coexistence. Though it retained ownership of many towns, company officials looked benevolently on the small merchants who existed on or near its property, perhaps seeing them as part of an environment conducive to keeping a productive labor force. Similarly, in the New

River Company town of Scarbro, West Virginia, in the 1920s, miners lived at the top of the hill while at the bottom could be found the company store, the post office, and some privately-owned homes and stores, including those of a few Jewish families.[44]

In small ways, direct economic relationships developed between coal companies and local merchants. One Jewish man recalled that company stores in Mingo County sold tickets to his father's Williamson movie theater, keeping 10 percent of the amount collected. Local tailors came into company stores to fit customers. In later years, some Jewish merchants even had concessions to run certain departments within company stores. Occasionally coal companies invested in local enterprises: according to a 1912 newspaper article, U.S. Coal & Coke planned to sell some vacant lots in Welch to Jewish businessman Joseph Lopinsky, who wanted to build a hotel. "Col. O'Toole, the manager of this big corporation, is heartily in favor of the proposition and his company will subscribe liberally to the stock," the article reported.[45]

Nevertheless, coal operators could easily lose sight of their enlightened self-interest in keeping workers satisfied, avoiding bad publicity, and encouraging town development, given their firm belief in their right to control any and all aspects of coalfield life that affected their industry and the formidable tools at their disposal to do so—the power of the state, their own private police forces, their control of jobs, land, and resources. And an even more compelling incentive led many to engage in coercive or monopolistic practices: an acute need to make high store profits in order to overcome losses in their coal operations. A government survey found "not a few" coal operators who stated that "while there was a loss in their coal-mining business proper this was more than counterbalanced by profits from selling merchandise and renting houses," reported *Coal Age* in 1915. One letter writer that year lamented, "Too often has the company store . . . been required . . . to carry the burden of other departments of a coal-mining

company by making good the losses sustained in those departments." The phenomenon was apparently fairly widespread. For example, a *New York Times* reporter discovered in 1931 that "many Harlan mines were turning their only profit at the commissary."[46]

Given the unpredictability of the national coal market, it must have been tempting to guarantee store profits by favoring miners who patronized the store (or punishing those who did not), stifling the competition, and hiking up prices. Ever ready to give in to this kind of temptation, George Wolfe spelled out the dilemma in a letter to Justus Collins, venting his ire at merchants who tried to undersell him and explaining why they must not be allowed to do so:

> If we attempted to meet all of this competition, we would wind up selling the whole shooting match at cost. . . . The merchants of Davy have cut our Powder profits from three thousand dollars per year to eight hundred dollars and if they have their way, they will make a serious dent in our store business and profits. Superior with her thin coal and decreasing selling price and little business and serious shutdowns and increased protection from liability . . . and general increase in taxes and everything that we have to buy in the way of supplies cannot for ever stand the strain and it is for this reason that we must try and find some legitimate way to protect ourselves.

The general profitability of company stores suggests that coal companies did a good job of using the stores to "protect" themselves from coal losses. As a government study noted, "the company store in all cases is decidedly a paying institution." Historian Crandall Shifflett, who tends to view company stores in a favorable light, acknowledges that they "appear to have been profitable enterprises." The company he analyzed showed "excellent" returns of 10 to 15 percent, and recollections of coal operators cite net store profits in the same range. But profits were often much higher than that. Wolfe, despite his complaints, netted an 80 percent profit at his Superior store. One Harlan County company store produced a 170 percent annual profit between 1934 and

1937. (The local sheriff and a county judge shared a financial interest in that particular store.)[47]

Coal Age took a defensive stance regarding the tendency for coal companies to rely on store profits, stating that it "may appear a damaging indictment against the coal operator, but surely because the mine owner has lost money in coal production is no reason why he should lose it in all his other ventures." But some of the journal's correspondents pointed out the disturbing implications. One letter writer noted that an average mine "can easily afford to lose three cents a ton in the cost of production if 40 percent of the men's wages goes into the store." (This was an achievable goal: James Laing found one store manager who "boasted of the fact that he had been able to get back 46 percent of the pay roll" at his mine.) As a result, some mine operations became geared to selling merchandise rather than mining coal and strove to employ good consumers rather than good miners. Not only were workers rewarded for store patronage instead of mining skill, the letter writer charged, "there are numerous examples of superintendents and foremen who hold their positions mainly because they are good trade-getters." The result for these mines was inefficiency, low morale, and increasing dependence on the store to make up for their deficiencies. The result for the entire region was to prop up basically unprofitable enterprises, thus contributing to the problems of overproduction and stagnation that plagued the coal industry and caused economic distress for the population generally.[48]

By issuing scrip, coal companies exacerbated the dilemmas the company store posed for independent retailers and for the economy as a whole. Like the company store itself, scrip began as a necessity. Currency fabricated by individual coal companies (in coins or paper) helped ease the shortage of cash in a region characterized at first by a lack of financial institutions. Although the use of scrip to pay employees soon became illegal, says historian Glenn Massay, "there was

nothing to prevent employers from issuing scrip" as an *advance* on pay, "and this became a common practice." While miners could receive their wages in actual cash if they waited until payday, scrip advances were often unavoidable: not only did miners need to purchase job supplies such as tools and blasting powder before they could even start working, but also, until the 1920s, many were paid only once per month. Scrip served as a practical accounting mechanism for companies involved in numerous transactions with their workers and it became standard in company stores throughout the coalfields.[49]

Once enmeshed in the scrip system it was difficult for miners to break away. Company officials quickly realized that scrip offered a way for them to boost store purchases. As Crandall Shifflett concedes, "coal companies encouraged easy credit." Analysts differ on how indebted the average miner actually was to the company store, though they agree that immigrants tended to be less indebted, and to rely less on scrip, than native whites or blacks. This was partly because they were more likely to be single men without families to support, at least locally (and if they were sending money home, of course, they needed to receive their regular pay). But whether or not miners found themselves in actual debt on payday, the use of scrip greatly reduced the amount of cash they received. And since scrip could be redeemed at full value only at the company store, it served as a powerful disincentive for them to shop elsewhere, regardless of whether or not their particular employer overtly pressured or coerced them.[50]

But that was not the only problem scrip caused local merchants. The system put pressure on the entire retail economy to operate on a credit basis. For one thing, scrip greatly contributed to the lack of cash in general circulation. As one Jewish man explained, his family's Northfork store had no choice but to offer credit, because "miners had scrip in their pockets." Also, miners and their families became accustomed to relying on credit. The company stores investigated by

the Coal Commission in 1922 made up to 78 percent of their sales on a non-cash basis. With company stores providing this service, independent stores had to do likewise if they wanted to compete for the miners' trade. But unlike the company stores, shielded from losses by their ability to deduct from their employees' pay, independent stores were vulnerable to bad debts. Although miners generally paid their bills as soon as they could, for small businesses trying to make it through hard times, that was often not soon enough. The Commission concluded that the volatile coal economy posed particular risks for the easily-overextended small coalfield retailer. "He must do most of his business on a credit basis. . . . As a consequence a number of independently owned stores come into existence when the mines begin work and go out of business when the mines are not operating." For retailers, therefore, the scrip system heightened the hazards of layoffs or strikes. When customers who normally settled part or all of their debt on payday suddenly found themselves unable to do so, the consequences could be "quite difficult," recalled one Jewish retailer. For as long as they could, merchants continued to "carry" their customers through these periods and hope that good times would soon return. "We just had to wait 'em out," he explained.[51]

Aside from offering credit, many independent retailers made another accommodation to the scrip system: they accepted scrip as payment, in lieu of cash or credit. Far from being usable only at company stores, scrip in fact circulated throughout the coalfields, aided by the activities of local scrip dealers who exchanged it (at a discounted price) for cash that could then be spent in local enterprises.[52] In addition, peddlers, coalfield stores large and small, theaters, and other businesses took in coal company currency in their daily course of operation. Before the postwar era, its impact was so widespread that, commented one Jewish merchant, scrip was "a way of life in those days." An interviewee who peddled in the coal camps in the 1930s to 1950s confirmed,

"to us, scrip was just like money." It is unknown how many retailers accepted scrip, though it would be safe to say that county seat stores were less likely to take it than stores located nearer the mines. Peddlers and shopkeepers accepted scrip at anywhere from 60 to 90 percent of its face value (most accounts suggest that the typical discount was 75 to 80 percent). Faced with the task of disposing of the currency, they either turned to scrip dealers or took it themselves to the company store. Companies maintained a variety of policies on how they redeemed their currency. Many demanded the purchase of goods, while others would exchange it for cash—but often at a discount. In this manner company stores could actually gain back part of what they lost to competitors who accepted scrip.[53]

On the other hand, merchants forced to deal with scrip tried to profit off the system in various creative ways. Some used the company stores as a sort of wholesaler: they would accept scrip at a significant discount (say, 65 percent), then use it to purchase large quantities of cigarettes, candy, or other goods at the company store. They would then mark up these goods and sell them in their own stores. Not surprisingly, this practice caused some coal companies to retaliate by refusing to take scrip presented to them by non-employees. Then, too, to small entrepreneurs accustomed to extending credit, scrip at least did not present the danger of uncollectable debts. Some peddlers in the coal camps were even willing to accept scrip at full value from their customers, and then sell it at a loss to scrip dealers—the mark-up on their goods was high enough to enable them to make a profit anyway.[54]

Since miners who drew scrip were at an automatic disadvantage if they wanted to spend it outside the company store, the system provided opportunities for scrip dealers and small retailers to exploit them.[55] Conversely, scrip also offered possibilities for savvy miners to manipulate the system. Using it prudently could work to their advantage in somewhat the same way that today's

consumers can benefit from judicious credit card use. Crandall Shifflett suggests that "miners brought to their dealings with the company store the same realism and practicality they exhibited elsewhere, and in doing so, they limited the hegemony of the store and the operators over their lives." Without this agency, the independent retail sector would have been considerably smaller than it was. Nevertheless, seen within the context of the dominant position coal companies held over their employees and their retail competitors, scrip overwhelmingly worked to benefit the region's reigning power, at the expense of the rest of the population.[56]

Adding up all the advantages, the 1922 Coal Commission concluded that "in every respect less effort is required on the part of the miner's family to buy at the company store than elsewhere." Even in later decades, the company store posed so many difficulties for independent retailers that interviewees for this study differed on whether or not their families' stores even attempted to solicit the trade of coal miners. Some who grew up in county seat towns maintained that because of the coercive policies of coal companies, scrip, and the remoteness of many coal camps, for many years their customers consisted of the region's non-mining population—a narrow slice of the overall demographic. They contended that miners did not become a substantial part of the customer base until unionization, the gradual elimination of scrip, and improved transportation loosened the grip of the coal companies and enabled coal camp residents to come into the county seat towns to shop. However, other interviewees stated that independent merchants had always vied with company stores for the trade of miners and their families, who constituted an essential part of their market. Certainly businesses based in the smaller towns, closer to the coal mines, had no choice but to compete directly with company stores.[57]

Aside from devising schemes to maneuver around the scrip system, independent retailers

found other ways to compete with company stores. The 1911 Immigration Commission noted that many foreign-born miners preferred to buy supplies from "grocery stores and markets conducted by members of their own race, which spring up in nearly all communities settled by immigrants." Even though Jews did not share the same ethnicity, they did share languages and customs with the region's East European miners. Hungarian-born Rudy Eiland's ability to speak several different languages helped him compete with the company stores around Logan. Immigrants felt more comfortable trading with him since "he could talk to them, they couldn't," his son observed. Many Jews spoke one or more East European language; some of their stores displayed the sign "Hungarian spoken here," others sold steamship tickets on the side in a bid to encourage the trade of immigrant miners. Max Roston's old country style helped him gain customers in the coal town of Wilcoe, West Virginia. The local population "could have found a greater selection at the company store, but we had the lower prices, and our customers knew that if they made a large purchase they could haggle with Uncle Max," his nephew writes. "Bargaining was part of the fun." This popular old country custom was definitely not an amenity offered by the company store.[58]

As Roston's nephew suggests, underselling was another strategy independent retailers pursued. In fact, interviewees mentioned the high prices charged by company stores as their primary leverage in attracting trade away from coal companies. Storeowners cited in oral history collections similarly maintained that high company store prices enabled them to compete. As one man observed, "Their charges was a little bit exorbitant. . . . There was no bargains in the coal company store." This testimony from independent merchants echoes other anecdotal evidence and supports the view that coal companies exploited their workers by overcharging them. Revisionists have argued that company stores did not inflate prices, citing the 1922 Coal

Commission study, which found that company store prices were not significantly higher than those at other coalfield stores. Nevertheless, the Commission acknowledged that "there is a universal belief among miners' families that prices are higher in company stores," a complaint that remained constant through the decades. (Accompanying this belief, it should be noted, was the common perception that goods in company stores were of better quality than in independent stores.) Again this is probably a case where considerable variation existed among coal companies. The Immigration Commission's 1911 report suggested that smaller companies in more isolated areas "take advantage of the situation and charge extortionate prices, but the larger companies seldom exact more than a reasonable profit." (A mitigating circumstance here may have been the higher costs of transporting goods to remote locations.)[59]

One significant generalization can be made, however: independent retailers, by their very existence, curbed the worst abuses of company stores. The Immigration Commission in 1911, the Coal Commission in 1922, and researcher James Laing in 1931 all found that company store prices tended to be lower in areas where local merchants vied for trade. The Coal Commission further reported that "quality of merchandise, upkeep of merchandise and store, and business methods were better where company stores and independent stores were in direct competition." The anecdotal evidence concurs: an eastern Kentucky storeowner noted that even though prices in the nearest company store were generally higher than at his own store, the company would occasionally engage in price wars with him, to the benefit of consumers. The sole interviewee for this study who insisted that company store prices were comparable to other store prices lived in Pocahontas, where independent competition thrived.[60]

George Wolfe's frustration with the dampening effect local merchants had on company store prices led him to offer a revealing analysis of his competitors and how they managed

survive in a difficult business environment. "This is the way these outside merchants figure," he explained to Justus Collins. If they can earn even a modest amount, "they claim that they are getting rich." As he saw it, their willingness to accept low profits gave *them* an unfair advantage, not the coal company.

> We have nine competitive stores in Davy and each one of them make a leader out of something and sell it at cost. . . . Most of the merchants in business here own their own property and are satisfied with very small profits, as their store provides them with a job and their families with eatables, so they are satisfied. Then some of them do not mind failing and beating their creditors.

While Wolfe is obviously not an unbiased source, his comments provide a glimpse into the marginal nature of independent coalfield retailing that rings true in many respects. The Coal Commission offered a similar assessment in discussing why company store prices were often higher than their competitors: coal companies needed to pay salaries and show a profit to shareholders, "whereas many of the independent stores are operated as family concerns with no salaries to pay and only the family living to get." Given the pitfalls surrounding local enterprise, especially outside of the county seat towns, it is not surprising that those independent concerns tended to be small, dependent on family labor, low in capital outlay and profitability. [61]

Interestingly, the observations of Wolfe and the Coal Commission echo the literature on small Jewish businesses which describes their longstanding tendency, arising out of the exigencies of European society, to carve out a precarious place on the edges of the economy. The Jewish merchants at Davy at the time Wolfe wrote (the mid 1910s) included general store owner Sam Masil, clothing store owners Myer and Israel Sneider, and the three Michaelson brothers, who owned a tailoring shop. The town also had two Jewish saloon owners, while several other Jewish merchants came and went during the course of the decade. A few remained in Davy into

the 1920s (Meyer Sneider's widow Lillian even outlasted Wolfe, operating the family store into the 1950s) while some others left to pursue opportunities elsewhere in the coalfields. Most, however, vanished from the local historical record.[62]

Davy's Jewish contingent offers a contrasting image to the more stable and prosperous merchant-based Jewish communities in coalfield county seat towns, but in many ways they were two sides of the same coin. From the standpoint of the region's retail economy, the problem with coal company stores was that they promoted the marginality of all small businesses—whether they intended to or not. They did not have to be guilty of the most egregious practices in their power in order to have a negative impact. Scrip, for example, boosted them over their competitors whether meant as a convenience or a snare. Though several factors restrained their monopolistic tendencies, their overall effect was to subdue commerce and narrow its scope. Their impact was greatest, of course, on the small independent towns located closest to the mines. Company stores inhibited the development of these towns by providing ample incentive for merchants to relocate to the county seats at their earliest opportunity. But even the county seats, those "good business towns," contended with the loss of a major portion of the region's potential customer base, as some Jewish merchants noted.

For decades independent stores served as a secondary shopping site for miners' families, after the company store. It is impossible to know what the economy would have looked like had that not been the case. (And stores were not the only businesses affected, since coal companies also operated theaters, barber shops, saloons, pool rooms, and other enterprises.) One thing we do know: by taking for themselves a large share of the retail trade, coal companies not only made life difficult for small businesses, they drained financial resources from the economy. Their profits, unlike the profits of local merchants, traveled straight out of the region. Scholars have

shown how corporate control of land and resources stunted diversification, as economic activity focused almost exclusively on the extraction of coal for outside markets. As we have seen, during periods when mining coal proved unprofitable, miners' consumer dollars were relied upon to maintain this status quo. Company stores therefore constituted an integral part of a single-industry order that proved unable to sustain a healthy economy.[63]

Jewish entrepreneurs attracted to the region by its growing population and its undeniable shortage of merchants found, upon their arrival, that the very industry responsible for this opportunity had developed a formidable system to take advantage of it themselves, thus limiting their own possibilities. Because they became absorbed into a coalfield middle class that supported the coal industry and rooted for its success, they accepted this situation without question. One retired Jewish merchant mentioned matter-of-factly that the Island Creek Coal Company had operated thirty-five stores in the Logan area, but since "their prices were higher," Logan Jewish merchants were able to coexist with them. Another man noted merely that stores in downtown Logan competed with company stores and "did very well." Jewish merchants simply went about the business of establishing their own niche in the coal economy, attempting to transform themselves from marginal shopkeepers in coal towns such as Davy into county seat business leaders. But it was not so easy to get from here to there. The following sections will explore their ability to achieve their goal.[64]

Before leaving the topic of the coal industry's impact on Jewish economic life, however, one remaining aspect deserves scrutiny. Sources used to determine Jewish coalfield occupations revealed only thirty-six people with a direct connection to the coal industry. Though small, this group does shed light on the Jewish coalfield experience. Sixteen businesspeople in the sample

invested in coal mining, while six Jews worked as company doctors and four held office positions. One young man clerked in the Pocahontas company store before opening a furniture and appliance store of his own. A few people in the sample dealt locally in coal sales or owned businesses that supplied equipment to coal companies.[65]

Precisely seven Jewish coal miners were identified from manuscript census records, interviews, and local history book profiles. They included one recently-arrived immigrant who became a prominent Welch businessman (Sam Polon) and one formerly-prominent Kimball merchant who fell on hard times. In the early 1910s, Isadore Tobin owned a saloon and five-and-dime store, while serving as Kimball's sergeant and treasurer. After a 1914 fire destroyed his business and left him bankrupt, he became a salesman in a Williamson general store and then a coal miner in Logan County, where his brother owned a pharmacy. Two sons of local shopkeepers also held jobs in the mines. In 1920, twenty-year-old Alex Leventhal worked as a coal mine laborer and lived with his parents, owners of a small Welch dry cleaning shop. Isadore Ofsa grew up helping out in his family's Keystone grocery store but worked most of his adult life in the mines, rising to become a mine electrician. His success at his chosen career was lost on his family, who considered him something of a failure. (He also married a non-Jewish woman, who became a valued part of the Ofsa family.) [66]

But the actual number of Jewish coal miners was undoubtedly higher than the sources revealed. There is a danger here of succumbing to biases in the source material. Interviews with both Jews and non-Jews elicited many variations of the phrase "I never heard of any Jewish coal miners," or, perhaps more telling, Jews "wouldn't work in the coal mines." As discussed previously, the universal belief (shared by many Jews themselves) that Jews could not or would not engage in manual labor led to discrimination on the part of coal operators and therefore

served as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. It is difficult to assess how much this stereotype also influenced interpretations of reality. Surely their networks and background dictated that the number of Jews working in the coal industry would be relatively small. (After all, unlike other groups, they were not recruited by coal companies.) But prevailing assumptions about Jews may have led people to believe that the number was even smaller than it actually was.

Even census records probably contain a bias. The manuscript census of the early twentieth century offers data on birthplace and native language, though not religion (the decennial U.S. Census has never collected data on religion). In larger coalfield towns, census takers typically (and astutely) classified Jewish immigrants by the empire or country they came from, rather than by the ethnic-based terms they commonly used to describe East European non-Jews, such as "Magyar" or "Slovak." However, in the coal camps, the census takers' response to Jews may have been different. Miners with Jewish-sounding names such as "Sam Weisman," "Joe Solomon," and "George Levetsky," for example, who in 1910 resided in two McDowell County boarding houses filled with Hungarians and Slovaks, were listed along with the others as "Magyar" or "Slovak." Not expecting to find Jews in such places, the census takers may have lumped Jewish coal miners in with their fellow miners. Without a conclusive way of determining the ethnic identity of these people, they could not be included in the study. For town Jews, evidence from other sources (synagogue records, interviews, local history books) was used to confirm the Jewish identity of people listed in the census. The lack of such corroboration for miners like the three men mentioned here indicates either that they were not Jewish—or that if they were, they were not connected in any way to the local Jewish community. This in itself would be an interesting finding, if it could be verified. Not only would it say something about class dynamics among Jews, it would also shed light on the process of ethnic stereotyping. If

Jewish coal miners tended to stay uninvolved with local Jewish communities, invisible to other Jews and to townspeople in general, it is no wonder that stereotypes remained so strong.[67]

Annual reports from West Virginia and Kentucky state mining departments during the first few decades of the century provide another way to get at the issue, though the information they contain is puzzling. In publishing statistics on the ethnicity of their states' coal miners, in some years the reports listed one or two "Hebrew" miners in the southern coalfields. However, during a few isolated years in the 1920s, that number suddenly took a considerable jump. It seems unlikely that eighty-five Hebrew miners worked in Harlan County in 1924 and none at all the following year, though that is what the Kentucky reports indicate (no ethnic statistics were compiled for 1923). And it seems only slightly more probable that the number of Hebrew miners in Logan and McDowell counties went from one in 1927 to twenty-eight in 1928 to thirty-eight in 1929 to zero in 1930, as reported in West Virginia statistics. The scarcity of Jewish miners revealed by other coalfield sources would suggest that these listings should be dismissed as inexplicable error. Yet given the undoubted biases of those other sources, and lacking an adequate way to assess the data collection methods of state mining departments, it would be premature to reject them completely. They remain a possible, if mysterious, corrective to the local perception that Jewish coal miners were virtually nonexistent.[68]

A discussion of other kinds of Jewish coal industry connections can be conducted on firmer ground. Some Jewish businessmen, such as former miner Sam Polon, profited from passive investments in coal companies or coal lands.[69] As a real estate developer, Polon also contracted with McDowell County coal companies to sell off their houses when the companies decided to divest themselves of their residential holdings. Several other men attempted to play a more active role in the mining business. Leo Schaffer, whose exploits as the notorious mayor of Glen Jean

were touched on in chapter 2, began his involvement in the coal industry in the late nineteenth century. In 1904 he leased some seven hundred acres from local land baron Thomas McKell to start the Dunglen Coal Company on the south side of Thurmond. One of the smaller coal enterprises in Fayette County (in terms of tonnage mined), the company lasted until at least 1910 with Schaffer as general manager or superintendent for most of those years. The mayor apparently brought his usual mode of conduct to his role as coal operator: in 1909 he and partner H. Lyon Smith were indicted for fraud, having attempted to secure a bank loan by claiming that their company owned twelve hundred acres of land (it owned no land at all). However, the case was dismissed in 1913.[70]

The dubious Schaffer notwithstanding, Jewish businessmen who ventured into coal mining included some of the most prominent merchants in the coalfields. Many were tempted into the business during the World War I coal boom; some were saloon owners who had recently been forced to close up shop because of prohibition. I. L. Shor of Keystone bought an abandoned mine near Iaeger, West Virginia, in 1915. Wolf Bank and Israel Totz joined with the superintendent of Keystone's leading coal company to form the Rock Pocahontas Coal Company in 1917. That same year, Wolf's brother Harry and other relatives incorporated the Kimball Coal Company. Jake Levine and Adolf Goodman started up a Mingo County coal company the following year. By coal industry standards, all these firms were insignificant; their outputs placed them among the smallest mines in their respective counties. The Rock Pocahontas company never extracted any coal at all, at least none that showed up in state mining reports. And none of the companies lasted very long: Shor got out of the business in 1918, Harry Bank dissolved his company in 1920, and Jake Levine's mine operated until around 1924.[71]

This questionable record bears out the memories of interviewees who recalled their elders'

forays into the coal business as less than successful. One man noted that his grandfather had made "a good bit of money" as a Pocahontas saloon owner and then went into the coal business and "pretty much lost all he had." Another asserted that these normally-astute businessmen, lacking knowledge of the coal industry, were destined to fail. "They saw people making money, and they thought they could do it too," he remarked. "It didn't last very long because they didn't know what they were doing." Two interviewees suggested that the merchants had underestimated the amount of capital needed for their coal ventures, and they either ran out of money or decided to get out before it was too late. However, I. L. Shor once claimed that his three-year stint as coal company owner was a success, yielding him a profit of more than thirty-thousand dollars. "It was not because I was smart," he told an interviewer from a Cincinnati Jewish newspaper in the 1940s. "I was just ready to work and G-d helped me." One wonders whether divine intervention also helped Shor succeed in his other real estate interests, which included accommodating some of the more wide-open activities that took place at the height of Keystone's boomtown years (see chapter 4).[72]

The most (perhaps only) lasting legacy of Jewish participation in the coal industry consists of the town of Totz, Kentucky. Harry Totz, whose parents brought him and his siblings from Lithuania to Keystone in the 1890s, owned a Northfork general store in 1921 when he acquired some coal land in Harlan County. He and his younger brother Abe moved to Kentucky and oversaw the construction of a mining complex and a town complete with post office and rail link. According to a recent *Harlan Enterprise* retrospective, "After making their fortune and feeling content with the fact they had started a community, the Totz brothers moved back to West Virginia" in the mid 1920s, selling out to "an entrepreneur named Billips." However, a Totz descendant recalled that the brothers' Kentucky venture went bust. The newspaper article does

note that "it wasn't until 1930 that Totz began to flourish," becoming a thriving, if rowdy, coal camp several years after Harry Totz had settled back into his role as a leading Northfork merchant. The town of Totz continues to exist today, "but at a slower pace." As of 1998, its mine was still in operation.[73]

Given their surroundings, it was inevitable that at least some Jews would be drawn into coal mining. Their participation, though miniscule compared to other groups in the region and far from satisfactory, was more substantial than most observers—from coalfield residents to contemporary journalists to historians—have discerned. For example, a 1936 *Fortune* magazine survey of American Jewish economic activity had this to say: "It is doubtful whether the roster of the leading twenty-five [coal] companies would show a single Jew from miner to manager on up to the board of directors." Because of the small number of people involved, few if any surveys of American Jewish history devote attention to Jews in heavy industry except to touch on the topic of discrimination. But their almost total invisibility is misleading, especially since local studies of other Jewish communities contain similar findings to this study. Norton Stern asserts that Jews became directly involved in Nevada silver mining in "a greater proportion than has been noted elsewhere." Robert Levinson writes that despite the local stereotype that Jews would not work as miners, "some Jews" in the California gold rush "did participate in the mining economy as miners and prospectors." For the most part Jews joined in gold mining "to help supplement their incomes from merchandising," though like their counterparts in the coalfields, they "soon . . . turned to merchandising almost exclusively." In both cases, they were not immune to the lure of their regions' dominant economic activity. But most soon realized that their networks, experience, and skills—not to mention their lack of knowledge of the mining industry—would enable them to achieve greater success in a subordinate sector of the economy.[74]

Resources for Survival, Strategies for Success

The economic environment produced by coal dependency provided the context within which Jewish merchants operated. Like the coal dust that permeated the air throughout much of the region, it was a constant fact of life. But other challenges often came to the fore that presented sudden and pressing obstacles to economic survival. The two most important were summed up in I. L. Shor's declaration that "Fire and Water were my only enemies." With many coalfield towns ranged along creeks and rivers in narrow mountain valleys, floods constituted a major, potentially ruinous hazard. Meanwhile, the rapid growth of these towns, especially instantly-created boomtowns such as Keystone, resulted in slipshod building practices and inadequate infrastructures, leaving a legacy of recurrent fires that easily turned into fast-spreading conflagrations.[75]

Coalfield newspapers offered frequent accounts of fires and floods that devastated large parts of downtown business districts, listing the merchants affected and the extent of their losses. The names of Jewish merchants appeared routinely. The great Elkhorn valley flood of June 1901 crippled businesses in numerous McDowell County towns, from marginal concerns such as Bessie Zaltzman's grocery store (a five hundred dollar loss) to Louis Totz's well-established "booze joint" (a fifteen thousand dollar loss). The Keystone conflagration of May 1917, "the biggest fire that ever visited the coal field," wiped out several Jewish businesses. According to the *McDowell Recorder*, "many of the buildings were frame and the fire swept so rapidly that nothing was saved from its path." The town's most prominent merchant suffered the most: one article estimated I. L. Shor's losses at more than one hundred thousand dollars. Shor recalled this fire as his "greatest financial set back . . . a total loss," since "no fire insurance was available in

Keystone at that time." This was not surprising, since the town had seen at least seven major fires over the previous two years. Fortunately for Shor, his coal mine and other investments helped him recover financially.[76]

Alternatively, some Jewish businesses succumbed to an entirely man-made calamity: the prohibition laws that struck West Virginia in 1914, Virginia in 1916, and Kentucky in 1919. Louis Schuchat had made "good money" in the liquor business in McDowell County, according to his daughter. "In prohibition [he] lost the whole bit," she related. "That's when my family started moving." The economic impact of prohibition spread beyond businesses directly involved in the sale of alcohol. Three of the towns most dependent on the liquor trade, Keystone, Pocahontas, and Middlesboro, also had the largest number of Jews in the coalfields during the 1910s. When prohibition caused these towns to languish, all local businesses declined, contributing to a population shift (Jewish and otherwise) to the county seats.[77]

The combination of floods, fires, prohibition, national recessions, and the chronic problems of the coal economy meant that coalfield merchants faced economic disaster on a fairly regular basis, with one type of catastrophe often compounding another. After the McDowell County flood of 1901, Bessie Zaltzman managed to rebuild her grocery store and began purchasing residential real estate. She then went on to lose three of her buildings in a 1914 fire (including her own home and all her household goods) and once again endured a blaze that destroyed her home in 1917. Pioneering Keystone merchant Wolf Bank saw his business interests greatly diminished by prohibition more than a decade before the Depression all but finished him off. In Middlesboro, small businesses caught in the devastating flood of 1929 were just starting to sort out their losses when the stock market crashed. Louis Sturm's store was one of many ruined in the deluge. Refusing the bankruptcy route, he struggled for years to pay off his debts while trying

to reestablish a store in nearby LaFollette, Tennessee, in the Depression-ravaged early 1930s.[78]

Clearly, success in the coalfields did not come easily—and once achieved, was not entirely secure. Bankruptcies were not uncommon among Jewish businesses large and small. In fact, many of the most prominent families endured a bankruptcy at some point, with the early Depression years contributing a disproportionate share. According to one historian, "the industrial economy of West Virginia collapsed" between 1929 and 1932. The state's economic situation was "among the worst in the entire country" and conditions were the most dire in the coalfields, where mines either shut down entirely or limped along at a couple days per week. A 1933 government survey determined that 63 percent of Mingo County families qualified as "destitute," while percentages in other southern coalfield counties ranged from 22 to 59 percent. Appalachian historians have documented the privation of workers and farmers during the era; in a rare reference to the Depression's effect on local commerce, William Forester notes that "merchants who were no longer in business left gaping holes in the business district in Harlan." Interviewees recounted the travails of leading Jewish businessmen. Eugene Lopinsky "lost everything." Wolf Bank's brother Harry was "ruined." Rudy Eiland's grocery business went under. Not all insolvencies resulted from local conditions: Adolf Goodman lost his bank, and the savings of the immigrant workers he catered to, in the stock market crash, while Sam Polon and Louis Fink lost their own fortunes the same way. With the most successful businesses in trouble, the more numerous marginal enterprises faced even more desperate circumstances. In somewhat of an understatement, one Jewish man whose family struggled through the era concluded that the Depression "hit small businessmen very hard."[79]

But business failures and bankruptcies were not confined to the Depression. The widespread reliance on credit—both offered to customers and advanced from wholesalers—meant that any

downturn in the coal economy, any uninsured fire loss, could sink a retail business. As early as 1889, Pocahontas merchant pioneer Michael Bloch and his partner Lena Baach placed their property under trusteeship because "pressing demands against them" left them "unable further to carry on their said business in justice to their creditors, as well as to themselves." After listing their many creditors (including Jewish wholesalers in Baltimore and Richmond), their court petition went on to state that "it is desirous that the services of their clerks, who are in indigent circumstances, shall be paid," including Lena Baach's twenty-year-old son Sol, owed $381.33 in back wages. (The business also owed money to Lena's husband Jacob, "a very poor man.") Two years later, having paid some of their debts, Bloch and Baach authorized local developer Alexander St. Clair to pay the rest, promising to repay him and using their homes as collateral. Bloch and Company went on to become the most prominent department store in Pocahontas—and the Blochs and Baaches became two of the town's leading families.[80]

While the historical record offers numerous examples of the trials and tribulations of the region's Jewish retailers, evidence of actual poverty is rare. Congregational records do reveal that coalfield Jewish communities occasionally stepped in to aid local Jewish families. In 1916 the Welch Hebrew Ladies Aid Society sent five dollars to "a family reported in need" and in 1922 the women sent fifteen dollars to "a Jewish man in Welch, who is in destitute circumstances." The following year they again assisted a needy local Jewish family. According to an interviewee, the Beckley B'nai B'rith chapter established an emergency fund in part to assist "people in the community who didn't have money, and believe it or not there were a few." It helped to pay funeral or medical expenses and meet other emergency needs.[81]

Interestingly, however, most personal charity doled out to co-religionists by coalfield congregations went to "out of town Jewish beggars" passing through the area rather than local

families. In fact, in a 1926 speech, communal leader Ida Bank noted that the Williamson Jewish Ladies Guild had been founded in 1913 largely "to take care of the needy Jewish traveling poor who were very numerous at that time." It is unknown how or why the town attracted transient Jews; perhaps its position on the Norfolk & Western main line played a role. It appears that these travelers were as much of an embarrassment to the Jewish community as anything else, since aid took the form of money for a meal and a train ticket out of town. The women stopped offering this service in the 1920s, but their male counterparts in the local B'nai B'rith re-established the practice in 1941, noting that "we have been bothered lately with schnorrers [Jewish beggars]." The men's Schnorrers Fund operated for the next several years to aid "the stranded people who are often visiting our community and are in need of help." Charity from Beckley's emergency fund also was devoted primarily to transient Jews who "got stuck" in town.[82]

The scarcity of examples of local Jews in need of charity suggests that destitution within coalfield Jewish communities was uncommon, even during the hardest of times. A survey conducted by Hebrew Union College in 1935, after the worst of the Depression had passed, found the economic state of coalfield Jews ranged from "fair" in Middlesboro and Williamson to "moderate" in Beckley to "good" in Logan, with no Jews on public relief in any of the towns. Yet until the post-World War II era, the standard of living for middling Jewish shopkeepers was not high. Most families—even some of the very successful—lived above or behind their businesses, and many took in boarders. Extended families often lived together in crowded conditions, as suggested by this excerpt from an article about a Pocahontas fire: "Joe Matz and L. Magrill had trunks, refrigerators, and groceries on their back porches and these were ruined. Mr. Ferimer's mother was sleeping in a room on the rear end of the house with the head of the bed next to the wall, also a little child of Mr. Magrill was in the same room."[83]

Frequent moves from town to town contributed to a less than comfortable lifestyle. One interviewee recounted the following family history: his father sold his Mount Hope, West Virginia, business in the early 1930s after a fire, moved back to Baltimore and opened a restaurant, went broke and returned to Mount Hope, opened a clothing store and went broke, removed to Charleston, returned to the New River region and opened a furniture store in Beckley just as the region was coming out of the Depression. Rather than poverty, instability and insecurity characterized life for many coalfield Jewish families.[84]

While the coalfield economic scene offered its own special challenges, instability often marked Jewish enterprise in both Europe and America. Small family businesses—undercapitalized, credit-driven, relying for their customer base on under-served rural or lower income groups, and generally existing on the margins of local economies—were particularly vulnerable to the larger economic forces that swirled around them. Frequent fires and overextension of credit contributed to high rates of failure among Jewish merchants in western mining towns. Jewish businesses in mid nineteenth century Buffalo, New York, manifested an impressive 57 percent failure rate. Thirty percent of Jewish businesses in mid nineteenth century New Orleans ended in bankruptcy, either by going through court proceedings or "simply clos[ing] up while owing money." The unstable nature of Jewish businesses in early twentieth century Johnstown, Pennsylvania, led one-third to file for bankruptcy between 1920 and 1940. Noting the marginal nature of Jewish enterprise in early twentieth century Providence, Rhode Island, Joel Perlmann concludes that mobility studies that classify all people engaged in commercial occupations as "white collar" or "middle class" are misleading. Yet, while the overarching narrative of American Jewry as ethnic success story memorializes the hardships

endured in the sweatshops and tenements of teeming urban neighborhoods, it gives short shrift to the long history of setbacks and failures family businesses endured on their way to middle (and upper middle) class prosperity.[85]

The lack of attention paid to this harsh reality conceals a significant cultural resource immigrant Jews brought with them from Europe. With generations of commercial experience behind them, Jewish families were accustomed to life on the economic fringe. They were well-acquainted with business failures caused by forces beyond their control, familiar with the process of starting all over again after losing everything. In the old country they had faced endemic rural poverty and discriminatory laws, not to mention economically calamitous flare-ups of anti-semitism such as pogroms, forced expulsions, and boycotts. In the U.S. they confronted recessions, fires, natural disasters. Though the problems had changed, their response remained the same. Jewish entrepreneurs in Johnstown "did not lose spirit when they lost their business," reports Ewa Morawska. "They remained hopeful that, if they 'kept at it,' they would stand back on their feet." Similarly, Jewish businesses in New Orleans maintained "the hope of ultimate success" which "initial failures did not, could not, change," says Elliott Ashkenazi. Their acceptance of "the possibility of frequent failure and relocation" enabled Jews to become "risk takers" who might well be considered "exemplary American capitalists," states David Gerber. To comparative historian Walter Zenner, the ability of Jews to persist in an unstable commercial environment, as well as the cycle of success and failure, conformed to a "familiar pattern" common among ethnic groups with historical experience as middleman minorities.[86]

Of course, Jewish entrepreneurs on both sides of the ocean did not rely on a positive attitude alone. They developed various strategies through the years to cope with hostile economic conditions, uncertainty, and defeat. Their networks were their most important asset, providing

job opportunities, information, and the credit needed to start a business, expand, or survive hard times. Rampant credit discrimination against Jews in nineteenth century America made internal sources of credit "a matter of necessity," states Stephen Mostov in discussing the "informal banking system" Jews developed "within the framework of retail and wholesale establishments." Within the immediate family, small Jewish businesses often depended on the labor of husbands, wives, and children. While reliance on ethnic networks and the family economy were customs Jews had in common with most immigrant groups, they evolved other approaches as well. Flexibility was a key attribute of Jewish businesses. Most needed little start-up capital and could be easily moved or altered in response to changing conditions. In fact, says Gerber, their very adaptability and seeming lack of solidity made non-Jews suspicious and reinforced the prejudices that led to credit discrimination. Creativity was another important trait honed by years of entrepreneurship. The ability to improvise, to respond to shifting circumstances, was popularly expressed by Jewish immigrants in the commonly-used phrase "a *yiddishe kop*."[87]

Jews in the coalfields inherited these economic survival mechanisms and employed them to good effect. The far-flung networks and communal ties that brought them to the region continued to support them as they made their way through the coal economy, helping them advance during the booms and persevere during the busts. Unlike other places in America, however, they did not face credit discrimination from the local elite. Many leading Jewish merchants received financial support from coalfield non-Jews early in their careers, to recover from fire (the West Virginia David Scott), flood (Rudy Eiland), Depression (James Pickus), or simply because local power brokers recognized them as up-and-coming entrepreneurs (Sam Polon, Harry Schwachter). Louis Gottlieb got a bank loan shortly after coming to Welch in the 1920s because his brother-in-law

had already established himself in town. Sam Abrams clerked for a Jewish merchant in Oak Hill, West Virginia, and after a dispute with his boss, a local doctor loaned him funds to start his own store. In fact, coalfield Jews were not isolated from the gentile business world. Some had non-Jewish wholesalers or partners; many had non-Jewish employees.[88]

Yet even in this accepting climate, the major source of financial support for coalfield Jewish enterprise came from Jewish sources. The strong bonds that held Jews together, their inclination to follow long-established and proven business customs, and the relatively greater access to support from fellow Jews meant that most simply did not need to turn to outsiders for help. The move from store clerk to store owner was rarely accomplished without assistance from family, other local Jews, or distant Jewish wholesalers with liberal credit policies. More often than not, those who offered assistance benefited as much or more than the people who received help—the "aid" was decidedly "mutual." Wholesalers enlarged their markets by supplying goods on credit to far-flung peddlers and shopkeepers. Merchants who gave jobs to relatives got low-cost labor and the opportunity to expand their businesses: many county seat shopkeepers sent employees out to peddle in the coal camps or open branches in smaller towns. Others set up relatives in business and profited as silent partners. And when it came time to retire, the first generation of Jewish coalfield merchants often sold out to the second. As these types of arrangements proliferated, Jewish-owned stores in coalfield towns formed an interconnected web of people directly or indirectly related each other. Just one example out of many: in the 1930s Goldie Scott Jaffe and her husband bought a store in Cumberland, Kentucky, from one of her uncles, just down the street from a store owned by another uncle, who had purchased his from her father.[89]

Partnerships offered an expeditious way to achieve the all-important goal of self-employment. At some point in their careers, at least 20 percent of business owners benefited

from a partnership with other coalfield Jews, often relatives. One interviewee recalled that after his father's Mount Hope business failed in the 1930s, father and sons worked as traveling salesmen for a Charleston-based firm. "From there we would all pool our money, my father, my brother, and I," eventually saving enough to go back into business for themselves. When Williamson pioneer merchant David Brown's store started to decline around 1914, "in desperation," he offered his new son-in-law Harry Schwachter "a fifty-fifty deal partnership" which saved the business. Brothers frequently banded together: the Liebman brothers, Michaelson brothers, Euster brothers, and Sneider brothers were just some of the sibling alliances that existed through the years. Entrepreneurs with no kinship ties also formed partnerships. In Williamson, for example, immigrant peddlers Beinhorn and Lovitch opened a furniture store in the 1910s that became a town mainstay.[90]

Outside of family and friends, local Jewish communities provided timely financial support. Since small retail businesses did not require much start-up capital, one retired merchant recalled, it was not unusual for people to "set each other up" in business by making small loans. During hard times this aid took on more significance. Although "going broke" constituted a family crisis, he acknowledged, in the New River area "there was a pretty good size Jewish community. They were all very close knit . . . they would loan money to each other." These internal lending activities reflected a self-help tradition based on the concept of *tzedekah*, which had given rise to a system of mutual aid societies in Eastern Europe and America. In Beckley and Williamson, communal organizations provided a framework for some of this support. However, unlike larger cities where Hebrew loan societies flourished, most mutual aid activities in the coalfields took place between individuals, outside of a formal communal structure. Morawska notes the same pattern in Johnstown, where Jews who needed financial assistance to open businesses or "keep

them afloat" borrowed "informally within the local Jewish community." Small communities did not have the organizational resources available to Jews in large cities, and relied on less systematized ways to fulfill their communal obligations.[91]

The cooperation and support coalfield Jews offered each other successfully withstood considerable internal conflict. Jewish merchants were competitors in a tough business climate, and their rivalries ranged from friendly to bitter. One man recalled that shop owners in Beckley used to watch each other carefully on Saturday nights to see when to close: no one wanted to be the first. Evidently this practice got a little out of hand in Williamson, because in 1911 the local newspaper announced that merchants had agreed on a policy to close at 8:30 p.m. every evening except "payday night and the three nights following and Saturday night," so that their clerks could "have some evenings to themselves."[92]

More severe conflicts ended up in the local courts. One somewhat unusual case shows how seriously some Jewish merchants took competition from their co-religionists. In the 1910s David Klein operated a store in Mullens, West Virginia, in newly-opened coal territory that few other merchants had discovered. After deciding to move his store into a larger space, he was horrified to learn that his landlord had rented the spot he was vacating to Eugene Lopinsky, one of the region's leading merchants. He offered to pay the landlord double the rent to keep his old space, but the contract with Lopinsky had been signed. When four of Lopinsky's employees arrived to unload their merchandise, Klein locked them out of the building. The landlord advised them to break in, and after they did so, Klein had them arrested for breaking and entering with intent to steal. After extricating themselves from the charge, one of the employees sued Klein for malicious prosecution—and the West Virginia Supreme Court concurred. More typical court battles centered around partnerships gone awry, real estate disputes, failure to pay debts. Yet

these quarrels, though frequent, did not prevent mutual aid within Jewish communities.[93]

Beyond family and community, Jews were linked to acquaintances and even strangers through a web of retail and wholesale connections. If nothing else, common experiences and cultural affinities bonded those who lived in or passed through the region. Ironically, though the Kentucky David Scott brought numerous relatives to the coalfields, he acquired his own business thanks to a man he had never met before. In 1918, on a buying trip for the Cumberland store he operated for his brother-in-law, he stopped in Pineville and happened to spot a clothing store called the Baltimore Bargain House. It was not uncommon for Jewish stores to bear the name of the wholesale companies that supplied them, and figuring that the store was probably Jewish-owned, he went in to see if he knew anyone. The owner, from New York City, had just been drafted into the army and was looking to sell out. Although Scott had no savings, the man liked him and, as a fellow Jewish entrepreneur, trusted him. He sold him the store entirely on credit. The Jewish business presence in McDowell County was strong enough in the 1910s that one job seeker felt confident enough to place this ad in the *McDowell Recorder*: "Young Man, (Hebrew,) good education, business abilities, knowledge of shorthand, bookkeeping and typewriting, desires position in store or office. Excellent reference." [94]

Jewish wholesalers cultivated relationships with small town shopkeepers, who constituted an important part of their business. The region's major supplier to Jewish businesses, the Baltimore Bargain House, strove to keep a personal connection with its customers despite its vast size. It offered free transportation to and from Baltimore to those who purchased a certain amount of goods and even sponsored its own boat or rail "excursions." A 1906 catalogue urged merchants to make themselves "perfectly at home" on its premises when they made their buying trips, offering "free desk room and the services of a stenographer if you desire them." The

catalogue, filled with chatty advice on salesmanship and store management, even promised, "We'll Take Your Photograph Free of Charge." Close ties between Jewish wholesalers and retailers contributed to retailers' ability to recover quickly from misfortune. Just two weeks after the massive Keystone fire of May 1917, Harry Budnick announced in a *McDowell Times* ad, "Burned Out But Still In The Ring. Just Returned From Market With A Select Line Of Goods To Start Anew." He immediately began doing business across from the spot where his old store had stood. Shortly after a fire in Yukon, West Virginia, destroyed the Hyman Underselling Store, the firm placed an ad in the *McDowell Recorder* stating, "Arrived in Yukon with car loads of goods to re-establish business."[95]

The vital support that coalfield Jewish merchants derived from local and distant networks made success possible, but that doesn't mean it made it easy. Small family businesses required long hours of work to be even marginally successful. Stores opened early and closed late; common closing times were 10 p.m. on weekdays and midnight on Saturdays. Jews who grew up in the region recalled the endless hours put in by their fathers, from early morning to well into the night, six days per week. But not just their fathers: as one person from Williamson stated, both parents "were so busy with the business, they never had time for anything else." And not just their parents: Marilou Schwachter Sniderman recalled in a memoir about her father that she and her siblings worked at the family store "as soon as we could see over the counter."[96]

Coalfield Jewish businesses, like their counterparts elsewhere in America in the first half of the twentieth century, were true family concerns, with wives and children working along with husbands to help make ends meet. Young women and men contributed to the household income also through jobs as sales clerks at other stores. Many coalfield families in the early years took in

boarders, a responsibility that fell entirely on the wives. Jews who grew up in the region before mid century noted that at the very least, their mothers "helped out" in the family store during busy times. Payday Saturdays would find stores crowded with shoppers and shopkeepers had to scramble to meet the demand; even women who devoted most of their attention to their homes could be found attending customers on these all-important days.[97]

But "helping out," though it was the accepted term to describe a wide range of women's economic activity, greatly understates the contributions to the household economy made by coalfield Jewish women. Motivated by varying combinations of family need and personal fulfillment, many took on significant responsibilities in the family business. One interviewee related that after his father went bankrupt in the Depression, his mother went to work in the family's next business venture out of necessity. Her input enabled their new store to succeed—and she remained active once conditions improved, which suggests that she was too important, or enjoyed it too much, to quit. Her actions were not unusual. Some wives functioned as their husbands' business partners in decision-making and division of labor, if not in a legal or financial sense. The division was often based on personality, with the more outgoing partner serving customers and the more reserved one handling behind-the-scenes tasks such as bookkeeping. This kind of teamwork did not necessarily diminish with increased prosperity; if the family owned more than one store, the wife sometimes managed a store.[98]

Women carried out their business activities with a mixture of pragmatism and confidence derived from a cultural tradition that had long recognized them as important economic contributors. While many immigrant groups of the era had a history of married women helping to earn income for the family, for Jewish women, religious custom made a major economic role even more acceptable. In Eastern Europe, the cultural ideal for Jewish men was a life devoted to

religious study. A woman who operated a business to support the family while her husband pursued his scholarship earned respect and praise. Although old country economic realities made this ideal possible for very few families, the concept of married woman as breadwinner was ingrained in traditional culture. Jews who grew up in the coalfields recounted instances of grandmothers operating small shops in Eastern Europe, New York, or Baltimore, and their daughters who came to the region simply built on their example.[99]

Coalfield census records and business directories from 1900 to 1920 list married Jewish women as owners of clothing stores, dry goods stores, and confectioneries. In later years they owned pharmacies, jewelry stores, even an auto supply business. Some female proprietors had husbands who ran their own separate businesses, such as Bertha "Mother" Horr, who operated a café in Middlesboro in the 1920s and 1930s while her husband William ran a hotel. Blanche Sohn owned a Williamson confectionery and then a dry goods store while her husband Eli operated a saloon and then a clothing store from around 1904 to 1920. When the couple went into business together, she did the buying, according to a newspaper item that informed readers, "Mrs. Eli Sohn is in the markets purchasing spring millinery. . . . Mr. Eli Sohn is painting the front of his store building in a very handsome style." It was not uncommon for grown daughters or widows to take over their late fathers' or husbands' businesses (sometimes in partnership with brothers or sons), or for widows to go into business for themselves. Widowed in 1912 at age twenty-seven, Mollie Gaskell became one of Williamson's most respected merchants and a Jewish communal leader as proprietor of the Williamson Bargain House (under the name "M.V. Gaskell"). Newspaper articles show that the broader community as well as local Jews favorably regarded the economic activities of Jewish women. In a 1920 obituary, the *McDowell Recorder* made special note that Pauline Josephy of Welch had been "active in business and charitable

circles" and had "assisted her husband in the conduct of a flourishing store."[100]

Women who played an active business role nevertheless retained sole responsibility for maintenance of the household. One woman remarked that for her mother, the store "was her life." She enjoyed the business and spent most of her days there. This did not absolve her from domestic chores, and she could often be found cleaning the house at 2 a.m. Another woman recalled that her mother "worked every day, worked hard," doing just about everything in their small family dry goods store, from serving customers to altering clothing to traveling with her husband to New York on buying trips. She saw her mother as a role model of strength and ability, proudly calling her a "tremendous buyer." Yet her mother's activities caused some hardship for the family; as the daughter put it, "We were latchkey kids." Torn between work and home duties, her mother had "no social life" (though she looked forward to the New York trips, where she and her husband would splurge on the opera). Single mothers, of course, faced the most difficult time. One man recalled that he and his widowed mother were "poor as church mice" in the 1910s. She took in boarders and worked in a grocery store to keep them going. However, women whose family businesses became successful often had their household duties relieved by a live-in maid, a common presence in middle and upper-middle class households in the coalfields and throughout the South.[101]

Despite the respect local Jewish communities accorded most businesswomen, the story of Bessie Zaltzman of Keystone reveals it was possible to overstep the boundaries of accepted female behavior. After emigrating from Russia as a teenager, this strong-willed woman arrived in the region around 1892 with nothing but a shiftless husband whom she divorced around 1905. She managed to acquire a cow and scraped together a living for herself and her three young children, selling butter and milk. Eventually she had a few cows and a small shop to sell her

wares. She then became a landlady, owner of small residential properties, overcoming crises that included floods, fires—and lawsuits. Early on, she embarked on a series of skirmishes with Jewish businessmen which occupied the local courts for years. Jake Shore tried to take advantage of her weak position as a divorced woman by holding her liable for a loan he had made to her ex-husband. His motive may have been purely economic, but there is a hint of moral disapproval on the part of her opponents as well: before her divorce, Jake had spread rumors that she was having an affair. Another Jewish man, whom she had sued over a sick cow she had purchased from him, advised her that she needed to get herself a husband. Her classic retort: "I don't have to have no husband. I have got good children and I have got good property." Bessie prevailed in the end: at her death in 1949 her assets totaled more than $84,000.[102]

Certainly the Jewish tradition of female entrepreneurship ran up against the modern middle class notion that a woman's place was in the home. After the immigrant generation passed away, it became less common for married women to be heavily involved in family stores—or operate their own businesses—except out of necessity. One woman interviewed for this study acted as her husband's business partner throughout her married life. She enjoyed the business world, she explained, because "I grew up in it." Yet she saw herself as an exception. More typical was Annie Fink of Beckley, described by her son as "99 percent a homemaker" whose ambition "was to be a good hausfrau." Since she had been forced to quit school in the sixth grade in Baltimore to help her struggling family by working in the needle trade, the middle class ideal might have come as welcome relief from a life of toil—but she did continue to "help out" in the store on Saturdays. In the post-World War II era, when American culture stressed domesticity and coalfield Jewish families no longer had to rely on the family economy, many single daughters nevertheless continued to work, increasingly as teachers, stenographers, nurses, and social

workers rather than store clerks. One daughter of a pioneering coalfield family managed a local radio station in the 1940s and 1950s, and a few female doctors and dentists worked in the region as well (they appeared as early as the 1930s, when Bertha Horr's daughter Goldie, a divorced mother, became a podiatrist).[103]

The economic contributions of coalfield Jewish women were critical to their families' survival and prosperity through the ups and downs of the coal economy. Yet they themselves tended to be somewhat dismissive of their efforts. Asked to describe how she had gained the skills to become a successful businesswoman, one woman said deprecatingly, "All you have to do is make one trip to New York and you're a buyer." Women used the phrase "helped out" to cover everything from an occasional Saturday turn at the cash register to major responsibilities. Esther Sturm Baloff, not one to hide behind false modesty, stated that she "helped" in the family business "when they needed me," especially during World War II when a shortage of clerks and an increase in business drew her into the store. Only as an aside did she reveal, "Also I did the bookwork and correspondence." Perhaps these women had internalized dominant societal attitudes toward women's work even as their cultural background, family necessity, and drive for personal fulfillment led them to enter fully into the world of small business. Interestingly, Jews who grew up in the region, men and women in their seventies and eighties looking back on their childhood, revealed a sense of pride in their mothers' strength, capability, and resourcefulness in the economic realm. One man remembered his mother as a "bright, feisty little woman" who pragmatically chose to work as a saleslady in another family's dress shop as the best way to earn an income after her husband's early death. Another summed up the feelings of many when he stated approvingly, "my mother had a good business head on her."[104]

A good business head certainly came in handy, whether possessed by male or female. Jewish storeowners prided themselves on their mercantile abilities. One longtime Williamson merchant, discussing how Jewish families managed to thrive in the rocky economic landscape of the coalfields, exclaimed, "They were good merchants! You know the old saying it takes a *yiddishe kop*." When asked to elaborate on what made them "good merchants," she offered that Jews did well because they "had to survive." Her seemingly circular explanation makes sense in the context of a long history of surmounting obstacles. Rather than focusing on particular traits, she instinctively reached back for the underlying motivation: Jews developed successful business survival strategies, because they had to. Her conclusion echoes the analysis of Jewish historians. As Andrew Heinze puts it, Jews had always been "inordinately dependent on the ability to succeed in trade." This imperative encouraged them to develop business styles and characteristics that constituted an important cultural resource.[105]

Some coalfield Jews did pinpoint specific attributes that they believed helped Jewish merchants succeed. Salesmanship was at the top of the list. "Jews were always great salesmen," commented the son of a leading Welch businessmen. "It didn't require great capital, all you needed was something to sell." As a retired Beckley storeowner put it, "In their businesses they were great. They could call all their customers by name." The merchants drew on a tradition of regard for the art of selling. A former eastern Kentucky peddler was merely repeating his own version of a familiar boast in Jewish folklore when he told his son-in-law, a Knoxville merchant, "'I sold women curtain goods who didn't even have a window!'" In her memoir *The Jew Store*, Stella Suberman captures the pride many Jewish merchants had in their interpersonal skills and the cordial, long-term relationships they developed with their customers. Her father, whose "banter was unflagging" and who genuinely enjoyed the sociable give-and-take of buyer-seller

interactions, liked to describe himself as a "born sal-es-man."[106]

Marilou Sniderman's portrayal of the partnership between her father and grandfather shows that not all Jewish merchants were "born salesmen"—and also that there was more to salesmanship than bantering. Her grandfather David Brown had little skill as a merchant. His "drab emporium" in Williamson was going downhill until son-in-law Harry Schwachter joined him. Schwachter's first move was to change the name of the store and put up a "big new sign." He then borrowed money from the bank to embark on a remodeling campaign, causing Brown to "run around wringing his hands, 'the boy's gone crazy altogether, we'll go bankrupt yet.'" But the risk paid off, as the younger man's marketing methods rejuvenated the failing store. Recognizing the importance of an attractive shopping environment—and being willing to take financial risks to achieve it—was part of astute retailing. Not that Schwachter neglected the personal side of salesmanship. Says his daughter, "Dad made every customer feel like a queen." His female shoppers "floated out the doorway with their packages with a sense of well-being."[107]

A "good business head" also involved creativity, openness to innovation, and ability to improvise during bad times and good. In the 1950s, a car peddler in the New River coal camps started to have problems collecting on his accounts as mining layoffs increased. His business suffering along with the local economy, he walked into a hardware store one day and saw a fabrics display. He bought his wife some fabric to make herself a dress—and then realized that other families were probably resorting to the same tactic to stretch their household budgets. He promptly threw out his old stock and went into the fabric business. Borrowing one thousand dollars from a family member, he spent three hundred on material and seven hundred on advertising. His strategy worked, and soon he expanded into the upholstery business, reasoning that people would sooner re-cover their old furniture than buy new. Meanwhile, another former

car peddler explained how small retailers scrambled to take advantage of good times. "We'd sell anything we could possibly get our hands on," from watches to pots and pans, lamps, end tables, mattresses—whatever could fit inside or on top of a car.[108]

The tendency of coalfield Jewish merchants to move into different lines of business as the economy dictated, their ability to bounce back from business failure, their propensity to take on low capital enterprises, and their geographic mobility all denote the flexibility needed to negotiate the region's fluctuating economic conditions. Many entrepreneurs pursued multiple ventures to get ahead. Between them, Max Ofsa, I. L. Shor, and Wolf Bank engaged in at least nineteen businesses in Keystone before 1930. Ofsa, a real jack-of-all-trades, worked variously as a bicycle repairman, mechanic, plumber, concrete block manufacturer, oil and coal dealer, and owner of a steam laundry, a restaurant, and a grocery store. Jews owned several of the region's theaters, a business that involved relatively small capital risk (movies were rented cheaply from distributors, who got a percentage of the box office) and offered a low-cost product, two characteristics that facilitated survival during inevitable economic downturns. Even so, the son of one Jewish theater owner recalled that during the Depression his father "worked like hell to survive, and thank God for bank night" (a lottery promotion used at that time by theaters around the country). "It saved the theater."[109]

Alternatively, some merchants applied their business acumen to finding just the right niche that would allow them to avoid competition with company stores and other retailers (including, often, their own relatives). After suffering a Depression-induced bankruptcy, James and Naomi Pickus of Beckley decided to aim for the "high fashion" market with their next venture; Pickus's two brothers already catered to lower income groups. Meanwhile, other families responded to overcrowded retail conditions with the time-honored strategy of moving to another town.

Although the trend was to relocate from smaller towns to county seats, circumstances sometimes required a move in the opposite direction. When Milton Gottlieb took over his father's clothing store in the early Depression years, "things were rough in Welch, too much competition," his brother recalled. The business failed and the Gottliebs moved to War, a nearby mining town, where a coal industry upswing enabled their new store to flourish. The family became part of the town's small middle class for at least the next couple of decades.[110]

While some merchants chose to set themselves apart from others by specializing, others competed to meet the basic consumer needs of the region's large working class market. Their strategy for survival echoed methods their ancestors had employed in Eastern Europe. Explains Andrew Heinze, "In the Pale, the success of Jewish commerce was based on the tendency to sell . . . at a low margin of profit in order to achieve a rapid turnover of merchandise." Immigrants transplanted this "Jewish style of selling" to New York City's Lower East Side—but the method also found its way to the coalfields, where the low prices it offered to consumers made it well-suited for competition against company stores. Car peddlers exemplified the style, with what one man referred to as a "scattershot approach" based on a high volume of small transactions. Storeowners also pursued a low pricing strategy. The numerous discount or "underselling" stores scattered across the region were invariably owned by Jews, while other Jewish-owned stores also strove to keep prices low to attain a high turnover—and undersell coal companies. The use of family members as employees kept costs down, enabling stores to maintain low prices and still eke out a profit. Buying their wares at the end of the season, when wholesalers slashed their prices, also helped. But rapid turnover could also be achieved by offering credit, in which case a low pricing strategy did not apply: credit transactions almost always involved a high mark-up on goods. (High default rates, however, meant that profit margins often remained slim.)[111]

Reliance on a high turnover, whether pursued through low pricing or credit, meant that these low capital enterprises devoted a large portion of their resources to promoting their wares. The fabrics entrepreneur who started his business by investing 70 percent of his funds in advertising offers a striking example. Coalfield Jewish retailers believed in the power of advertising and put much of their creativity into convincing people to buy. Their ads may have lacked subtlety, but they did get their point across—and often, that point concerned low prices. A 1900 ad for Hurvitz and Lopinsky's Great Eastern Bargain House plainly spelled out their philosophy: "Our aim is to sell our groceries so as to keep selling, and the only way to do that is to sell at low prices." There were attempts at topical humor, as in a 1902 ad that proclaimed (with the first two words in extra bold type) "THE STRIKE! In the Hard Coal Region Will Not Be as Hard on the Miners as our Cheap Prices Are on our Competitors." More common were hackneyed protestations of distress. A 1911 double-page ad for J. Levine's Williamson dry goods store offered a particularly exuberant (if not quite convincing) sample of the genre:

> Face to Face with Trouble: My creditors are clamoring for their money. . . . I am forced to sacrifice my stock. . . . No such sale of such gigantic proportions has ever been held in Mingo County . . . a tremendous slaughter of modern merchandise . . . no fake, but a bonofide [sic] sale to save my good name. . . . My customers will profit from my misfortune. Everything will be on sale as advertised, and is backed up by my honorable business career in Mingo County.

Quite often these tales of woe did have a ring of truth in them, as in this comparatively restrained (though visually prominent) ad which ran after the great 1917 Keystone fire: "The entire stock of Hermanson's which was slightly damaged by water during the big Keystone fire will be sold by the Underwriters for the next ten days. Ask your own price." Though "slightly" water damaged, Hermanson assured his customers, his stock was "New and Up-to-date."[112]

The hyperbole of Jake Levine's ad shows that the quest for sales could result in aggressive

marketing tactics. Some Jewish merchants did pursue somewhat questionable methods to achieve success, while a few developed reputations that conformed to negative economic stereotypes about Jews. The recollections of both Jews and non-Jews include less-than-rosy memories of certain hard-driving Jewish businessmen. As one man said of his grandfather, "Business was business whether it was relatives or not." A non-Jewish customer recalled one leading merchant as "gracious to me and my family, as long as you paid your bills." Trying to avoid making a derogatory comment, she continued, "He just wanted his money when he wanted it. He never did bother my family." At least a few Jewish businessmen followed the absentee practices of the region's land corporations (albeit on a far smaller scale) by holding real estate after moving away and failing to maintain it. And as civil court records show, relations between Jewish merchants and their customers were not always pleasant. Some lawsuits involved charges of fraud against the merchant, though mostly they involved merchants suing to recover debts.[113]

But such cases constituted a minority. Jewish merchants generally got along well with their coalfield clientele and many gained the respect of the local populace through the comportment of their businesses. Beyond the obvious motivation that good customer relations were good for trade, they also saw themselves as contributing members of their communities. In small towns, work life was intertwined with social life: being a good neighbor and conducting business honorably were one and the same thing. Moreover, they were inheritors of a Jewish ethical tradition that offered explicit precepts regarding the proper performance of trade. "Acknowledging the importance of commerce in Jewish life," notes Andrew Heinze, "the Talmud had set forth a series of injunctions to maintain a high standard of conduct. . . . The revered texts of Jewish law insisted on honest representation of merchandise and on generosity toward consumers." He asserts that "These points of commerce would not be unanimously

upheld, but they shaped the method of Jewish merchants in both Europe and America."[114]

While coalfield merchants were not necessarily learned in the fine points of Jewish law, they recognized this aspect of their tradition. As a Beckley businessman explained, it was part of Judaism "to be fair in your dealings." Upholding the standards of the religion was "a way of life" as well as a source of satisfaction to him and, he believed, to many of his fellow Jewish merchants. "Most of us were fairly upright and honest people," he concluded. A man who grew up in the Welch Jewish community agreed that "it was a part and parcel of their religion" for Jews to conduct themselves with "honesty and integrity. . . . That's why there was strong respect for Jewish merchants." Newspaper articles and obituaries offer evidence of high public regard for Jewish businesspeople, from the "square dealing" Joseph Lopinsky to Middlesboro's Sam Weinstein, "very popular with the boys at the mines." Recollections of Jews and gentiles reveal the same for less-well-known merchants. One non-Jewish woman recounted her cordial relations with three Jewish merchants and especially recalled one who was "a fine person to deal with." Esther Baloff related how her family earned the good will of her community of LaFollette. When the local mines shut down in the early 1920s, the Baloffs' store started accepting scrip (giving cash back in return) and issued credit to "people who needed help." Later, she claimed, people said they "would have starved to death" if not for the Baloffs. Other Jewish merchants also issued credit during recessions or strikes. Though this may have been mainly a survival tactic, they were also moved by their customers' travails. Their actions were appreciated by many.[115]

Jews seemingly suffered from a major disadvantage compared to many of the region's merchants: their small numbers and lack of a working class base meant that they could not build their businesses on the consumer needs of their own particular group. But this was a familiar position for them. In fact, because of their longtime status as members of a minority that had

provided commercial services to others, Jewish immigrants were likely to be more comfortable dealing with people from different cultures than other local merchants. This could well have given them a competitive edge in establishing good customer relations and gaining trade in the multicultural coalfields. The proficiency of many Jews in several East European languages was an obvious manifestation of this advantage.

The region's other ethnic groups also used strategies such as a reliance on the family economy and aid from ethnic networks to develop their own commercial contingents. Yet the background of coalfield Jews furnished them with resources other groups may have lacked. Joe Trotter, for example, points out that African Americans developed a merchant- and professional-based middle class whose businesses catered to the large population of black coal miners. But, he notes, black merchants suffered from company store competition more than whites, because they did not have the access to capital and commercial training that whites had. Although he was comparing black enterprises to those of the native white coalfield establishment, his observation applies as well to Jews who came to the region with their own credit sources and past retailing experience. Such assets enabled Jews not only to meet the challenges of the coal economy, but to develop and sustain a retail niche that lasted into the late twentieth century. Within this niche, individual families struggled, survived, maintained, and prospered.[116]

The few secondary sources that exist on coalfield Jews are filled with accounts of economic mobility. Success stories start with the first Jewish man to enter the region: in the 1870s, Arnold Midleburg became the most prominent businessman in Sewell, the region's first boomtown. Those who played pioneering roles in their towns, such as Michael Bloch (Pocahontas), Wolf and Harry Bank (Keystone and Kimball), Sam and Harvey Weinstein (Middlesboro), and Josef

Herzbrun (Welch), had especially notable careers. Yet the mixed experiences of Bloch and the Banks, cited previously, show that even leading Jewish families did not escape misfortune.[117]

Measuring overall Jewish economic mobility is a tricky task. For one thing, those who did not manage to overcome the hazards of the region's business environment tended to move away, thus becoming statistically invisible. The "people who stayed" did indeed develop "thriving businesses," as the Williamson merchant quoted earlier insisted. Yet her generalization masks a complex reality. For many families who lived in the coalfields for two or more generations, economic well-being did not arrive until the second generation came of age, around the time the region recovered from the Depression. A man who grew up in Beckley acknowledged that "my father never did succeed" until going into business with his sons after World War II; "he sort of plugged along." A native of southeastern Kentucky stated that his father's business career was "sort of an up and down thing," with the family moving around quite a bit until finding the right situation in the mid-1930s. Businesses grew during the boom of the late thirties to early fifties, and those who had not achieved economic success earlier, or who had seen once-vital businesses languish during the Depression, now had the opportunity to flourish. It is this period that interviewees recall when they describe coalfield Jewish communities as "prosperous."[118]

Some Jewish immigrants with struggling small businesses chose a different route to economic mobility: they focused their efforts on enabling their children to receive a college education. A man raised in Northfork in the 1920s and 1930s noted that his parents expected him and his sister to attend college even though "it was a real economic problem" for the family to send them. He explained, "That was their dream, that their children would make more of their lives than they themselves did." His sister became a McDowell County high school teacher and he became a Charleston lawyer. Other members of his generation also pursued professional

careers. Both paths to mobility, educational-professional and retail, conformed to American Jewish patterns. For Jews in big cities, the "drive for white-collar employment and ultimately for the professions" began in the 1920s, says historian Henry Feingold. In small towns across America as well as the coalfields, prospects for advancement within the entrepreneurial niche encouraged the second generation to remain within it somewhat longer.[119]

The database developed for this study sheds some light on the economic position and mobility of coalfield Jews. Fifty-seven percent of people in the occupational sample held the status of business owner or proprietor at some point in their lives, while an additional 6 percent held professional jobs. (The 57 percent figure rises to 59 percent when wives of proprietors who had boarders are removed from the sample.) In the retail category alone, 66 percent were or became storeowners. Mobility can be roughly gauged by examining movement within this category: 35 percent of clerks and 77 percent of peddlers went on to become storeowners. This gives some indication of opportunities for advancement, though the percentage is misleadingly low, since many wives and children of business owners are included in the "clerk" category and therefore already belonged to business-owning families. Clearly, though, Jewish-owned businesses employed young Jews, a substantial portion of whom went on to start their own businesses and continue the cycle. On the other hand, many of the businesses that Jews did establish were marginal, so the fact of ownership in and of itself reveals only so much. Moreover, the peddler-to-merchant progression occasionally went the other way: there is some downward mobility in the sample as well, with a few owners reverting to the status of clerk, salesman, or peddler (and then sometimes re-emerging as owners again).[120]

While statistics cannot tell the whole story, evidence from all sources indicates that on the whole, Jewish coalfield families found the economic security, stability, and indeed, prosperity,

they were seeking when they came to the region. Some became wealthy: in the 1920s the Schwachters were considered by Williamson townspeople to be "just plain rich," while Sam Polon did well enough to lose over a half million dollars in the 1929 stock market crash—yet maintain his position as a leading Welch businessman. The Weinsteins, after accumulating property around Middlesboro, even sold off one large tract to the Middlesboro Country Club for use as a golf course. In fact, merchants who did well in retailing often expanded into commercial and residential real estate. Most Jewish families did not reach such exalted heights, but they did manage to attain a middle to upper-middle class lifestyle that enabled them to live comfortably and ensure that their children could attend college. In the working class coalfields, where the structural failings and endemic inequalities of the coal industry caused hardship for a large portion of the population, such middle class families could be considered part of the elite.[121]

Regional Transformation and the Role of the "Middleman"

Jewish immigrants came to the coalfields because the region offered the chance for a better life than they had known either in Europe or their ports of entry in the U.S. The retail niche they forged upon their arrival enabled them to meet their immediate goal of economic survival—"anything to make a living," in one man's succinct phrase—and go on to pursue their longer-term goal of economic well-being. By performing their commercial role and taking their place as a component of the coalfield middle class, they not only advanced their own goals, they took an active part in the transformation of the region from a relatively isolated agrarian back country to a rural-industrial society thoroughly integrated into the national economy.

Much has been written about the transition to industrial capitalism in Central Appalachia. Since the region's primary function in the capitalist "world system" was (and largely still is) to

supply raw materials for industrial development elsewhere, most analyses have focused on how large corporations appropriated land, labor, and technology in order to extract and export coal and timber. Studies of rural America beyond the mountains have likewise documented how local agrarian economies became incorporated into the broader capitalist system, at different times in different places. For example, the rise of the cotton economy in the post-Civil War South had an effect on small rural producers comparable to the rise of the coal economy on mountain farmers: in each case, a transformation in modes of production resulted in a loss of local ownership over resources, the draining of wealth from the region, and dependency on larger market forces. Capitalist integration provoked resistance across the country, as rural inhabitants fought to retain not only local economic control, but also a traditional way of life rooted in communal, agrarian norms rather than the individualistic values of a modern, market-based society. [122]

In recent years rural historians have turned their attention to patterns of consumption as well as production, and their findings have complicated this portrayal of rural folk as unwilling victims of outside corporations or impersonal market forces. The emerging consumer economy of late nineteenth century America held out the promise of a better life—especially for women who, given the patriarchal structure of agrarian society, endured the "plainness and drudgery of life on the farm" without many of the compensations afforded to men. In fact, both sexes saw the benefits of new products increasingly within their reach as a result of improvements in transportation, communication, and mass production. Despite the conflicts provoked by change, Edward Ayers finds "little indication that most southerners wanted to avoid the market," while Hal Barron asserts that rural northerners eagerly joined the "emerging consumer culture" but attempted to do so "in ways that were consistent with their own values and priorities." David Jaffee summarizes, "Rural residents were less concerned with resisting the intrusion of

capitalism than with articulating their own mode of indigenous commercialization."[123]

These authors acknowledge that rural America's engagement with the modern national economy was at best a mixed blessing. For northerners, says Barron, it proved both "troubling and irresistible," leading them "in directions they did not anticipate." For southerners the consequences were potentially more dire: debt and "debilitating poverty," as Ayers puts it. The country store, where southern farmers not only purchased goods but also marketed their crops, symbolized the two sides of the market, he writes: "The store held out new pleasures and comforts, but it pushed the harsher aspects of trade deep into rural life."[124]

Discussions of rural consumer patterns have recognized the importance of local retailers in connecting the countryside to the national market system. Merchants and peddlers (along with mail order catalogues and the "drummers" sent out by national firms) served as disseminators of modern products, styles, and sensibilities. Historians have charted the central role played by the general store, from the rural South to the western frontier. While Lewis Atherton in 1939 described the frontier storekeeper as "an important force in converting the primitive economy to more urban patterns," recent historians place merchants in the context of an advancing consumer society, typically referring to them as "agents of modernization" who spread a "consumer ethic" through the countryside. In more remote places, where undeveloped transportation systems and low population densities were, in Atherton's phrase, "unable as yet to support the settled petty capitalist," the retailing of goods fell to the lowly peddler. Recounting the impact of these itinerants on rural families, historians become positively lyrical. To Jackson Lears,

> The primal scene of the emerging market culture . . . was the peddler entering the isolated village or rural community, laden with glittering goods that were ornamental as well as useful. . . . He was an emissary of the marvelous, promising his audience magical transformations. . . . The peddler opened his pack and presented a startling vision of abundance.[125]

The peddler is indeed a compelling figure: as an outsider and direct link to the cosmopolitan world, he served as a "lightning rod" for both "the anxieties and aspirations of a developing market society." Through the prosaic act of toting inexpensive manufactured goods into the countryside, he introduced people to "the transforming powers of material possessions"—magic that was social and cultural, rather than supernatural. But the peddler also represented a threat to the established rural order: he "undercut the domestic authority of men" by dealing primarily with women (whose consumer options were "limited by constraints on their travel and by their discomfort" in male-dominated commercial places) and offered unwelcome competition to country merchants. As a result, the image of the peddler alternated between a benevolent, if exotic, Santa Claus and a suspicious, potentially dangerous stranger. Folklore depicting him as a swindler and sharp dealer reflected rural people's "fears about the dangers of consumerism . . . and the morality of the market." And by mid-nineteenth century, "popular assumptions tended increasingly to conflate the peddler's mobility and marginality with his Jewishness."[126]

While exact percentages are unknown, clearly a significant portion of nineteenth century peddlers were German Jewish immigrants following the "demographic and territorial expansion of the country." As peddlers and as small town shopkeepers, Jews aided in rural America's assimilation into the national economy. Their premodern status as a "middleman minority" linking the European countryside to the city had propelled them to the forefront of capitalist transformation in the old country, and as immigrants, many found opportunity by settling in the very places where their skills and networks matched the needs of populations caught up in various stages of the same process. Their role in rural America, Elliott Ashkenazi points out, confirms theories about "the crucial position minorities of all types have occupied during the growth of capitalism. Outsiders seem to do especially well in such circumstances."[127]

Historians of southern and western Jewry have highlighted different aspects of the Jewish contribution. While Ashkenazi focuses on their role in building the economic infrastructure of the Mississippi Delta, Thomas Clark cites their impact on the rise of small town specialty stores and city department stores in the post-Civil War South. Robert Levinson and Earl Pomeroy note that small western towns benefited from Jewish wholesale connections, especially in dry goods, clothing, and tobacco. By transporting a wide variety of goods to the frontier, Jews "brought the comforts of civilization to the people of the interior." Stephen Whitfield addresses the cultural implications of their activities, asserting that "Jewish businessmen, however unintentionally, introduced elements of the modern ethos into the [South]. . . . Their peddlers' packs and sample cases helped cultivate a taste for the products of the modern world."[128]

Events occurring throughout rural America were part of a larger social transformation, as consumerism helped forge a national culture out of a polyglot American society. Parallels can be drawn between scattered country folk and immigrants crowded into the cities, between the role of Jewish peddlers in the countryside and Jewish street vendors on New York's Lower East Side. Of the latter Andrew Heinze contends, "The collective effort of these anonymous immigrants ended up broadening the scope of urban consumption." By continuing their old country function of catering to under-served, excluded groups, Jewish retailers helped the urban masses achieve an American lifestyle and identity through the purchase of inexpensive commodities. Lizabeth Cohen cautions that immigrants responded to the promise of consumer culture in complex ways (for example, using modern products such as the phonograph to celebrate their own cultural traditions). Small Jewish retailers provided a bridge between old and new: members of Chicago's ethnic working class chose to purchase the fruits of consumer capitalism not in imposing downtown stores, but on Maxwell Street, the famed West Side Jewish market. "Here they

shopped as in Europe, haggling over prices in their native tongue and comparing the quality of merchandise." Yet by the 1930s, they had begun to "share a cultural life" as American workers through their engagement with consumer culture. Perhaps, then, both rural and urban dwellers can be said to have participated in the broader process of "Americanization" through consumption, in their own distinct ways and "according to their own agendas."[129]

Perhaps also, the role of obscure Jewish retailers in country towns and city neighborhoods can be likened to that of their famous *landsmen*, the Hollywood moguls and department store "merchant princes" who had such a marked effect on American culture. Heinze includes the street vendors with the moguls in noting that "Jewish entrepreneurial talent broadened many avenues of mass consumption in America." Both partook of the same "buoyant spirit" of an old commercial tradition transplanted to a society that gave it scope to operate. Given the networks that tied small Jewish businesses to their sources of supply, the connection could have been more than just figurative. One non-Jewish coalfield resident recalled how a local Jewish theater owner made annual trips to Hollywood, where he reportedly hobnobbed with the rich and famous. Another insisted that the Lazarus family of Pocahontas was related to the Columbus-based Lazarus department store dynasty. While neither story can be taken as fact (both, actually, are doubtful), they surely *could* be true. If nothing else, they reveal the extent to which small town Jewish retailers helped their fellow residents see their towns as linked to the larger world.[130]

The growing coalfield population of the early twentieth century included both groups discussed above: immigrants (many of rural origin) and native country folk, black and white. Like their counterparts elsewhere, they became drawn into the national consumer culture as mass produced goods began to flow into the region via peddlers, company stores, and independent

merchants. Coalfield residents too participated in modern culture in their own ways, according to their own needs and desires, guided by their own customary practices. Natives and immigrants both sought to retain rural customs of self-sufficiency and communal reciprocity while indulging in new consumer activities. Gardening, hunting and livestock keeping, home food preservation and clothes making, bartering and haggling coexisted with modern shopping.[131]

Conversely, writers have noted how the uncertainties of coal mining—the danger of death or disability, the lack of job security—combined with the availability of scrip to promote an "exaggerated consumptive desire" in mining towns. According to John Gaventa, these factors "served to shape a value of short-term individual interests. . . . It was only rational" for miners to purchase goods while they had the chance. The stereotype of the free-spending coal miner was commonly accepted as fact by inhabitants of the region. As a Jewish merchant put it, "One thing about coal miners—they spent their money. They didn't save it."[132]

Scholars have focused little attention on the emergence and operation of a burgeoning consumer market in the Central Appalachian mountains. Ronald Lewis provides an overview of the process, noting that the new commercial centers that arose with the timber boom "influenced the lives of dwellers in both town and countryside by providing employment, binding the country people to the cash economy, and radiating the expanding consumerism of the modern American economy. . . . Where a few years earlier stood a vast wilderness," now railroad and telegraph linked the region to the national marketplace and made all kinds of manufactured goods available. An investigation of the role of Jewish retailers helps to fill in the details. The methods they employed to import and promote their goods, their decisions concerning what and where and how to sell, helped to shape the contours of modern life in the region.[133]

In the coalfields, as elsewhere, peddlers served as the advance guard of consumer culture.

Baltimore Bargain House catalogues from the turn of the century reveal that the wholesaler sold every kind of general merchandise imaginable. Of course, peddlers were restricted to whatever they could tote on their backs or in their horse-drawn wagons, but the range of possibilities was still broad. In addition to cloth goods and accessories of all sorts, they might carry practical items such as washboards and cutlery, or leisure items such as musical instruments (banjos, harmonicas, "jews harps") and toys. Some descendants of coalfield peddlers stated that their fathers and grandfathers specialized in certain wares. Samuel Aaron carried "shoe findings" through the mountains (by 1906 he owned "a very fine shoe store" in Bluefield). Max Soon peddled umbrellas in the Williamson coalfield before opening a store in town in the 1920s. Items such as shoe findings, needles and thread, and "yard goods" carried by coalfield peddlers suggest an intermediary stage in the process of consumerism: people were still repairing their own shoes and making their own clothes, but purchasing the raw materials from itinerants.[134]

Although the role of peddlers diminished as the years passed, some continued to traverse the more remote pockets of the coalfields long after the county seat towns had established themselves, attesting to the unevenness of regional development. One woman related that her father peddled in the New River coalfield in the early 1920s with a horse, but no wagon. He carried rugs, blankets, bedding, pots and pans, dishes, and other household wares. The existence of car peddlers from the mid-1930s into the 1950s indicates that even at that late date, some areas remained relatively inaccessible and unconnected to the commercial amenities common to modern life. Reasons for their condition varied from coal company domination to bad roads to wartime gas rationing, which kept many coal camp residents from making long trips.[135]

As Lewis points out, the region's towns served as hubs that extended the commercial spirit deep into the back country. Peddlers, though they earned their living in the hinterlands, based

themselves in the region's larger towns, close to the rail lines that brought their goods to them. Jewish merchants in county seat towns and other local centers often sent employees into the surrounding area to peddle or take orders for goods. If prospects seemed favorable they opened satellite stores, so that some newly-created, seemingly remote hamlets boasted one or two Jewish-owned stores. For example, the Henry brothers of Keystone operated a branch in Coeburn, Virginia, by 1900, while the Hymans of Keystone and Pocahontas had a store in Yukon in the 1920s. From their base in Sewell, West Virginia, Lopinsky and Hurvitz spread their Great Eastern Bargain House chain to several coalfield towns.[136]

Rather than traveling into the countryside, other retailers encouraged their rural customers to come to them. A 1902 newspaper ad placed by the Weinsteins urged, "The country readers of the *Republican* are advised to give these hustlers a visit. Why let your town cousins reap the benefit of these sales? Come to Middlesboro, visit the stores of H. Weinstein & Bro." Such merchants clearly understood that their market extended beyond the boundaries of their bustling towns. By targeting residents of the surrounding area with their advertisements, they no doubt contributed to the throngs that gathered in county seats and other hubs on Saturdays. As a Jewish woman who lived in a county seat in timber-rich Pocahontas County, West Virginia, explained,

> Our customers came from the area about fifty miles around Marlinton. The roads were not as good as they are now, and a whole family, lumbermen or farmers, would come to Marlinton for a day of shopping. We did a lot of advertising, including a monthly magazine, and while we were in Marlinton [between 1916 and 1930] we doubled the size of the store.[137]

Coalfield newspapers reflected the importance Jewish merchants placed on advertising and on employing the latest in merchandising techniques. In 1901 the *Fayette Journal* announced that the Great Eastern Bargain House chain "made a contract with the *Journal* this week for 3000 inches of advertising to be used during the next year. This well known firm is a judicious user of

printer's ink. . . . This is the largest contract for advertising ever made in Fayette County." Publishers were understandably delighted with such businesses for the revenues they provided—and also because they were engaged in a project dear to their own hearts: bringing modern business trends into the region. Newspapers served not merely as venues for advertising but as partners in promoting new retailing methods. Often it is difficult to tell the difference between articles and ads. A 1914 *McDowell Recorder* article headlined "A New Way Store" extolled the opening of a Welch department store "under the management of the well-known Eugene Lopinsky who is recognized as a progressive man of business." The store featured innovations such as a "ladies' rest parlor" and a billiard room. Further, the article explained,

> This store is not only new in name and in stock, but it also operates the "New Way" system of displaying goods and waiting on customers. The "New Way" is the most modern of the up-to-now methods. . . . Goods are kept for display in dust-proof glass cases and wardrobes. Customers can look about and pick and choose, and when a selection is made a salesperson quickly slides back a concealed door and the customer's choice is there, neat and clean.[138]

Such innovations represented an attempt to elevate the shopping experience. Just as New York City's Jewish street vendors used various strategies to make street shopping for working people more "refined," coalfield Jewish merchants tried to lift their downtown business districts into a realm of modern, middle class sophistication. Harry Schwachter epitomized their enthusiasm for the up-to-date approach. His store renovations and careful attention to window and merchandise display constituted a deliberate effort to bring the "new way" to Williamson. Writes his daughter, "His ideas were new for the small town, and he was clever enough to introduce them slowly."[139]

Coalfield merchants received encouragement and support for their modernizing project from beyond the region. Many turn-of-the-century small town stores used display materials and

dispensers sent out by national manufacturers; perhaps equally important to Jewish storeowners was the influence of their favorite wholesaler. The Baltimore Bargain House served as a "modernizer" in more ways than one. Not only did it connect the region to eastern markets and expose its clients to city trends during their buying trips, its catalogue featured articles urging small town merchants to respond to the fashions of the times and provided tips on how to do so. One 1906 article exhorted,

> No matter how small your town may be—no matter how modest your business may be—it will pay you, and pay you well, to have your establishment touch the limit of up-to-dateness. Modern folks are not content with the sort of stores that served their parents and grandparents. People nowadays . . . keep abreast of the times; they know what is going on outside their own communities.

The writer advised retailers to keep their stores clean, bright, and well-organized, their stock fresh and "free from dead styles." They were told to put their "best bargains on display" and to train their clerks to be aggressive. "Any clerk can sell what is asked for if he has it in stock," the writer observed. "Selling what is not asked for is where *real salesmanship* comes in. . . . When a customer comes in to buy a half-dozen towels, don't let her leave until she has been told about the 'great 10-cent handkerchief' that you are selling."[140]

By adopting the advice of manufacturers and wholesalers, small town merchants constructed the local infrastructure of consumer culture. Sales techniques strove to boost people's consumption habits—in other words, to create demand. Display techniques served to standardize the shopping experience. Marketing techniques proclaimed the superiority of products and styles flowing in from outside the region. Schwachter's choice of a new name for his spruced-up store is telling: National Department Store. Other Jewish-owned coalfield stores bore names such as the "New York Racket Store" and the "Baltimore Bargain House." Like

other small town merchants, coalfield storeowners began to push products with "unique and nationally advertised name brands," helping to advance "a consumer ethic that equated 'new' with better and 'modern' with improvement."[141]

As major advertisers, coalfield Jewish merchants became leading disseminators of modern styles and sensibilities. Often their ads focused on low prices and appealed to the reader's rational urge to save money—but increasingly they enticed the reader's imagination. They cultivated a taste for the fashionable, associating their products with urban style, sophistication, and excitement. Clothing stores boasted of their direct link to the city. One 1900 Great Eastern Bargain House ad stressed that its Sewell store's Baltimore-trained milliner "will be pleased to give the ladies her personal attention," while a 1911 ad for Sohn's men's clothing store of Williamson noted that its "Fabric and Cutter are from the famous House of Schloss Bros." According to the ad pages, city-bred milliners routinely landed in the coalfields from Baltimore or Cincinnati, bringing "the newest and latest" clothing, "strictly up-to-date in make, style and shades." And the luster of modernity was not limited to clothing. In 1911 the *Recorder* heralded Joseph Lopinsky's return from Cincinnati, where he had acquired "the latest and best" moving pictures for Welch's new opera house. In 1915 his brother Eugene installed a "magnificent electric sign" on the corner of his department store that featured 350 multi-colored blinking lights and flashed one word at a time, prompting the *Recorder* to declare, "Thus Welch grows more like New York City every day." A 1920 ad for real estate developer Moses Hyman celebrated the increasingly metropolitan character of the town:

> There is more building going on in Welch at this time than you will find in most towns three times its size. . . . Welch is fastly taking on the appearance of a real city. . . . When you get off the train, your eyes are greeted with a sea of faces—multitudes of people, rushing automobiles and the success of its business and professional people are written on their faces.[142]

Of course, such rapid changes were unsettling as well as exciting. Merchants were not hesitant to indulge in a certain amount of nostalgia, if it could be turned into a buying opportunity. As early as 1899, Weinstein & Bros. looked back on a simpler era:

> Grown-up people will remember how they used to look forward with pleasure to Christmas time. They felt good whenever they saw a picture of Santa Claus and wondered what they'd find in their stocking in the morning after his visit. Now it's different. The coming of Christmas is considered a matter of dollars and cents. You don't find much pleasure in a picture of Santa Claus, because you have to pay for the things he has on his back. But you ought to cheer up and be happy, for it won't cost near so much to buy presents this year if you buy them at our store.[143]

The buying trips that storeowners regularly made to Baltimore, Cincinnati, and New York proved an important vehicle for the transmission of urban styles and attitudes. Jews typically had family and friends in metropolitan areas and were more likely to travel outside the region than other coalfield merchants. While they did not necessarily return with the *very* latest fashions (it was cheaper to buy at the end of the season), the trips served as learning experiences, and the knowledge gained filtered through to their neighbors and customers. In 1903 the Middlesboro newspaper reported on Herman Weinstein's return from a two-week trip to New York. "The firm, as soon as summer comes, will make some changes in their manner of running the store, and will also add some new features. . . . Herman took notes while in the metropolis, and these he will bring into play when the proper time arrives." Newspaper social columns constantly reported on the business-related comings and goings of Jewish merchants; probably storeowners themselves placed these items as a form of free advertisement. Perhaps even more than paid ads, these ubiquitous missives accustomed readers to look to the cities as the source of quality and style. Certainly they served as a persistent reminder that the coalfields, far from being isolated,

were firmly linked to mainstream American culture.[144]

Buying trips were not the only way to import merchandise. Storeowners combined these forays with ordering from wholesale catalogues and purchasing from drummers who came through the region. National manufacturers did not ignore mountain consumers. As one Logan Jewish merchant recalled, "We used to be flooded with salesmen." With all these sources of supply, the coalfields suffered no lack of manufactured goods. In an article reviewing his town's mercantile history, merchant Rudy Eiland noted, "There is hardly anything that a person would wish for or want to purchase, that you could not find in the City of Logan." (Though he wrote in 1952, his statement had applied for decades.) Although consumers' wishes and manufacturers' designs were important factors, local entrepreneurs determined precisely which products of national consumer culture would be offered and in what form they would be presented. As discussed earlier, coalfield retailing became increasingly diversified as general stores gave way to a plethora of specialized establishments (including that modern incarnation of the general store, the department store). Jewish merchants contributed greatly to this trend. Their decisions, influenced by the need to survive in a competitive environment, gave coalfield inhabitants a surprisingly wide range of shopping choices. As one Pocahontas resident recalled, "Anything you wanted you could find somewhere in town, there was such a variety of businesses."[145]

The impact of Jewish retailers on the spread of consumer culture through the coalfields varied from place to place. They had a substantial presence in many small towns, while they were entirely absent from others. Their presence was greatest in McDowell County. In War, for example, Jacob Shore and/or his sons owned the Leader Store, Shore's Department Store, the War Bargain House, the War Theater, and the Grand Theater. Summarized a longtime resident, "He owned the whole town here at one time." Their influence in the county seat of Welch is

evident from extensive coverage in the local newspaper. Before the Jewish high holidays in 1922, the *McDowell Recorder* even saw fit to print a special message from the Welch rabbi, who

> . . . calls the attention of the people of Welch and the surrounding territory to the fact that the big Jewish holidays will soon be here and all the Jewish merchants and business men will have their respective stores and business closed for three days. He advises the purchase of all necessary things in advance of the following dates . . .

When a 1915 *Recorder* editorial took stock of the town's business climate, it began by singling out three establishments, two owned by Jews: "How many people stop to think of the advantages Welch has? Here we have three big department stores, Lopinsky's, C.D. Brewster & Co., and the Hub [owned by Isaac Levinson], that will all do credit to a city many times our size."[146]

Jews made up a large percentage of retailers in many coalfield county seat towns and their stores served as anchors for downtown business districts. They comprised a key element in a town-based middle class of merchants and professionals whose collective activities served to disseminate modern ways throughout the region. With their direct links to Baltimore, Cincinnati, and New York, their frequent trips back and forth, their devotion to advertising and other modern retailing methods, and an outlook that was generally more urban-oriented than that of other coalfield residents, it could be argued that Jews had an impact on the development of coalfield consumer culture that went beyond numbers and percentages.[147]

To put that impact into perspective, it is helpful to place Jewish merchants within the context of discussions about the role of local elites in the region's socioeconomic transformation as well as historical debates over consumerism. While the driving force behind the full-fledged capitalist integration of Central Appalachia was resource extraction carried out largely by absentee corporations, historians have recently intensified their scrutiny of how the region's local

power structure interacted with this process. In their case study of Clay County, Kentucky, Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee contend that preindustrial leaders set the region on the path to peripheral status by failing to engage in productive efforts to develop the economy, choosing instead to fight amongst themselves for control over the diminishing returns afforded by a subsistence-based agricultural system eroded by population pressures and external competition. Their role as modernizers consisted of enlisting external sources of capital to rescue them from the dilemma of a shrinking economic pie. As agents for absentee corporations, elites facilitated the transfer of resources to outside forces who imposed a single-industry economy, in exchange for retaining local control over social relations and a share of the profits—with the ultimate effect of consigning large parts of the region to dependency and poverty.[148]

Jews and other newcomers, of course, played no role in events leading up to industrialization. And except perhaps in a couple rare cases, they never attained the power of established elite families to influence local politics or society. Like them, however, they served as boosters for coal-based development and played an important, if ancillary, part in transforming the economy. As emissaries of modern consumerism they contributed to the process of dependency both materially and culturally, by encouraging the local population to embrace the imported goods churned out by the industrial economy (not all of which could be said to enhance daily life) and by promoting the superiority of cultural trends emanating from beyond the mountains. They were participants in—and beneficiaries of—a system that proved destructive in many ways. Viewed in this light, their role can be seen as negative.

Indeed, to some critics of capitalism, the role of merchant is by definition worthy of censure as inherently wasteful and exploitative. Wilma Dunaway, for example, refers to preindustrial Appalachian merchants as "nonproductive profiteers" who provided no benefit whatsoever to the

local economy. This sort of blanket condemnation of people engaged in the circulation and distribution of goods because they do not actually produce anything has been a staple in social commentary (not to mention popular opinion) for centuries.[149] In reality, however, circulation is a vitally necessary economic function that arises as soon as societies reach even a modicum of complexity. As theorists such as Fernand Braudel have pointed out, the discomfort many societies have had with the role is one reason its "socially essential tasks" have so often been relegated to minorities. Lewis Atherton spells out some of these tasks: "The merchant's activities relieved other residents of . . . certain functions—the farmer's need to market produce, for instance." And by importing goods, merchants "liberated" residents from having to produce everything themselves. The issue therefore becomes defining the line between helping farmers sell their produce and taking advantage of them, between freeing people from burdensome work and pushing them into a harmful dependency.[150]

Debates concerning consumer culture exhibit a similar polarity. Some historians stress how affordable mass produced goods improved the lifestyle of ordinary people, not only liberating them from work but enabling them to find new forms of self-expression. They describe the rise of consumer culture as an egalitarian development that allowed working people to enjoy higher standards of living, helped women and minorities challenge patriarchal and racist norms, and obliterated class distinctions. More critical commentators counter that the new consumerism debased local cultures of all sorts, promoted an extreme form of individualism detrimental to healthy communities, and served to obscure the very real class distinctions and power imbalances that continued to define American society—all in the name of profit. The negative view contends that agents of consumerism manipulated people into embracing a mind-numbing materialism that impoverished cultural and intellectual life, while the positive view insists that

consumers were not passive victims, but active participants guided by self-interest who not only consumed but also shaped mass culture through their influence on its purveyors. These different characterizations, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Many observers see the spread of consumer culture as a complex dynamic involving the interaction of all these factors.[151]

In the coalfields, the dynamic was further complicated by the all-encompassing power of coal companies and the existence of company stores. The region's history suggests that claims regarding the egalitarian effects of consumerism can be taken too far. Increased ability to purchase material goods surely did not correlate with an increase in local democracy: even as residents attained access to the products of modern life, the coal industry and the region's large landowners were creating and enforcing a socioeconomic system that caused class distinctions to become more pronounced than ever before. The company store served as both a place to acquire consumer goods and a place that reinforced workers' subordination to their employers. John Gaventa suggests that miners' consumption patterns were in fact an expression of their powerlessness: their situation discouraged a sense of long-term control over their lives and encouraged an attitude of living for the moment.[152]

If consumerism did offer a way for workers to exercise agency, it was largely because a small but vibrant independent retail sector provided an alternative to the company store. From this standpoint, far from being exploiters and profiteers, merchants added some much-needed balance to the region's economy by substantially contributing to what little diversity existed. In their competition with company stores, Jewish-owned businesses linked the coalfields to a different set of distribution networks, increased the range of consumer goods and shopping choices, served as an alternative source of consumer credit (especially meaningful during strikes), and hampered the ability of coal companies to engage in monopolistic practices such as

price gouging. Of course there were local business people, Jewish and otherwise, who took advantage of their position to indulge in exploitative practices of their own. Nevertheless, locally-based independent retailers pointed to the possibilities of a healthy economy. And the nostalgia with which the bustling county seat towns are recalled by coalfield residents suggests that the goods and services found in those commercial centers, the leisure opportunities and social interactions that occurred there, were valued by ordinary people.[153]

But the possibilities exemplified by small retail business could not be realized given the structural realities: the imperatives of coal dictated conditions of life in the region. In 1940, for example, the retail sector was actually the second leading source of jobs in McDowell County, employing nineteen hundred people; coal mining employed nineteen thousand. In the 1950s, when mechanization began to seriously—and permanently—decimate the mining workforce, unemployment spread through the coalfields. With most of the land still controlled by absentee owners and reserved for resource extraction, alternative forms of economic development failed to catch hold. The boom and bust patterns of previous decades became replaced by patterns of persistent poverty. And so over the next few decades more than one million people moved away, among them the bulk of the coalfield Jewish population.[154]

It must be noted that despite the peculiarities of the coal economy, the economic and demographic trajectory of coalfield Jews conformed to general trends in small town American Jewry. The changing career aspirations of the third generation (toward corporate and professional occupations and away from small retail business), in conjunction with the national transformation of small town retailing, would have caused the Jewish retail niche to fade even without the coal industry, if not as quickly nor as completely. The "malling" of America, which affected Central Appalachia in much the same way it affected other rural areas, helps put the

region's evolution in perspective: though development was distorted by the single industry focus, it occurred as part of a larger process of capitalist maturation. The region's function in the system might have been different from other peripheries, but the relationship to the core was similar in many respects. Central Appalachia was one of many rural areas that lost population in the late twentieth century, as national trends favored suburbanization over both rural and inner city growth. Geographers have noted that the decline of small town Jewish communities throughout the nation has been associated with the general decline of their small towns.[155]

The out-migration from Central Appalachia involved the descendants of the immigrants, blacks, and native whites who had caused the population to swell less than a century before. Historian Joe Trotter points out that despite the inequalities that permeated coalfield society, the region did provide opportunities and "an upward shift in mobility" for members of all these groups, even mountaineers (who, recent scholars have pointed out, had already experienced a decline in the local agricultural economy before industrialization began).[156] To southern sharecroppers, peasants and traders dislocated from the European countryside, and farmers scratching out a living on small, exhausted mountain plots, the growing towns and camps of the coalfields represented a step up. In pursuing their goals, these people all contributed to the development of the region—even if the coal industry ultimately determined the course of that development. The economic niche forged by Jews enabled them make their particular contribution as part of the coalfield middle class. The following chapter will consider the Jewish position and contribution in the social context, as members of that middle class.

Notes to Chapter 3

---

[1] Goldie Scott Jaffe, phone interview with author (30 April 2000); records, B'nai Sholom Congregation, Harlan, Ky. (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati).

[2] Jaffe interview.

[3] Walter P. Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 134. See also David Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock: Elite Anti-Semitism and the Quest for Moral Order in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Marketplace," *Journal of American History* 69 (December 1982): 615-637; Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); Joel Perlmann, "Beyond New York: The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I. and Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-1915," *American Jewish History* 72 (March 1983): 369-394.

[4] On how coal industry managers based hiring practices on ethnic typecasting, see Randall G. Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis: Industrializing Society on the Central Appalachian Plateau, 1860-1913" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983), 49-50; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, Senate docs. 633, 61st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington: GPO, 1911), 225-228. Edna Moore Drosick, interview with author, Pocahontas, Va. (26 April 1998).

[5] Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 19; Manuel Pickus, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va. (18 May 1998); Rose Marino, *Welch and Its People* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Press, 1985), 109; "Opens New Store," *McDowell Times*, March 17, 1916. On the widely-held view that Jews were unsuited for physical labor see I. M. Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* 72 (September, 1907): 487-583.

[6] Perlmann, "Beyond New York," 384. See note 13 on database of Jewish coalfield occupations.

[7] U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, 1920, Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Raleigh Counties, West Virginia; Tazewell and Wise Counties, Virginia; Bell and Harlan Counties, Kentucky. Yvonne Snyder Farley, "To Keep Their Faith Strong: The Raleigh Orthodox Community," and "One of the Faithful: Asaff Rahall, Church Founder," *Goldenseal* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 43-53.

[8] Studies of the Jewish economic role in rural or small town America include: Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); Robert E. Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York: Ktav, 1978); Hal Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon': Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865-1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83-104; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*.

[9] Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*, 15; Evans, *The Provincials*, 39; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 3. Observers of antebellum southern Jewish life mostly focus on how Jews fit into the system of feudal social relations that the planters attempted to maintain, without necessarily going into the question of whether the southern economy was actually a feudal economy.

[10] Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 185; Mary

Beth Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 270-296 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[11] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 34, 41. On the relationship between Jewish merchants and their East European customers in a different Pennsylvania coal region, see Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Communities: A Study of the Demography, the Social, Educational and Moral Life of the Anthracite Regions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1904), 28-31. Roberts's study, filled with the misguided racial theories and stereotypes prevalent among social scientists of his day, nevertheless provides evidence of the close economic link between immigrant Jewish merchants and Slavic coal miners.

On the dependence of Jewish immigrant merchants on an African American customer base see for example, Steven Hertzberg, "Southern Jews and Their Encounter with Blacks: Atlanta, 1850-1915," *Atlanta Historical Society Journal* (Fall 1979): 7-24; John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957), 128-130; Louis Schmier, "For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do Enough: A Jewish Peddler and His Black Customers Look at Each Other," *American Jewish History* 73 (1983): 39-55; Clive Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow," *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 55-80; Edward Cohen, *The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999); Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998); Evans, *The Provincials*.

[12] Moses Rischin and John Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); Norton B. Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 15 (October, 1982): 48-78; Hal Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'"; Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush*.

[13] For this study, a database was constructed with information on more than two thousand Jewish residents of the coalfields of southern West Virginia, southeastern Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia. To create an occupational profile of coalfield Jews, a slice of this database was created consisting of all individuals for whom job information had been gathered, a total of 950 individuals. Sources include: manuscript census schedules, city directories, local histories, interviews, and courthouse records.

[14] Lou Mankoff, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va. (March 1996).

Other studies of merchant-based Jewish communities report a similar business distribution. Johnstown Jews concentrated in five lines of business: apparel and shoes (including general stores), notions, jewelry, furniture, foodstuffs—"the merchandise in which local Jewish jobbers also specialized" (Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 61). A 1951 survey found that 36 percent of small-town Jewish retailers sold clothing, shoes, or general merchandise and 10 percent sold foodstuffs, while other business types included scrap metal and junk, jewelry, auto parts and accessories, hardware and building supplies, and drugstore products. Robert Shosteck, *Small-Town Jewry Tell Their Story: Survey of B'nai B'rith Membership in Small Communities in the United States and Canada* (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Vocational Service, 1961 [1953]), 15.

[15] Gail Bank, phone interview with author (28 September and 4 October 1998); Sylvan and Elaine Bank, phone interview with author (4 March 1998); Kenneth Bank, interview with author, Baltimore (6 November 1998); Reva Totz Hecker, interview with author, Baltimore (5 November 1998); Milton Koslow, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va. (13 May 1998); Ira Sopher, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va. (13 October 1996); Isadore Gorsetman, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va. (13 May 1998); Sidney Fink, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va. (12 October 1996); Pickus interview. On

car peddlers, see also Simon Meyer, *One Hundred Years: An Anthology of Charleston Jewry* (Charleston, W.Va.: Jones Printing Co., 1972), 33.

[16] Evans, *The Provincials*, 28; Ken Bank, Sylvan Bank, Koslow interviews; Isadore Scott, phone interview with author (14 December 1997); Edward Eiland, interview with author, Logan, W.Va. (19 May 1998); Bernard Gottlieb, interview with author, Clarksburg, W.Va. (5 November 1996); Melvin Sturm, phone interview with author (4 October 1998); Sam and Harvey Weiner, interview with author, Logan, W.Va. (8 November 1996).

[17] Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963), 1102.

[18] Jerome Paul David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town: A Sociological Study of Jewish Identification" (M.A. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1974), 7.

[19] Ken Bank interview; records, B'nai El Congregation, Logan, W.Va. (American Jewish Archives); various interviews.

[20] Martha Albert, interview with author (8 November, 1996); Bernard Gottlieb, Sylvan and Elaine Bank, Koslow, Pickus, Sopher interviews; Logan congregation records; *Beckley City Directory 1940* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1940); *Williamson City Directory 1952* (Chillicothe, Ohio: Mullin-Kille Co. and *Williamson Daily News*, 1952).

Jews who attempted to break into the corporate, professional, and academic worlds before World War II faced widespread discrimination, which served to confirm them in their small business niche. After 1945 they "witnessed a lowering of economic and social barriers . . . unprecedented in American history." Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 28. On the effects of the GI Bill and lessening discrimination see Karen Brodkin Sacks, "How Did the Jews Become White Folks?," in *Race*, ed. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 78-102; Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[21] U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population*, 1950, 1970; Clyde B. McCoy and James S. Brown, "Appalachian Migration to Midwestern Cities," in *The Invisible Minority: Urban Appalachians*, ed. William W. Philliber and Clyde B. McCoy (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 35-36; Weiner interview; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 517; "Idle Coal Miners Face Present with Despair in West Virginia," *New York Times*, Friday, January 27, 1961. On the impact of chain stores on small town central business districts see Ira M. Sheskin, "The Dixie Diaspora: The 'Loss' of the Small Southern Jewish Community," *Southeastern Geographer* 40, no. 1 (May 2000): 52-74, esp. 68.

[22] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 98; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 336; Sylvan Bank, Pickus interviews. In a thoughtful account of one southern Jewish community's decline, Terry Barr cites a similar blend of economic and personal factors. See "A Shtetl Grew in Bessemer: Temple Beth-El and Jewish Life in Small Town Alabama," *Southern Jewish History* 3 (2000): 1-44, especially 24-32.

[23] Fink interview.

[24] Richard M. Simon, "The Development of Underdevelopment: The Coal Industry and its Effect on the West Virginia Economy, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1978); Jerry Bruce Thomas, "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and its Effect on Area Development,

1872-1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1971), 83-88; Eiland interview; Isadore Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va. (13 October 1996).

[25] Emanuel Katzen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Princeton, W.Va. (30 May 1996); Albert, Fink, Bernard Gottlieb, Eiland interviews; Rudy Eiland, "The Retail Merchant," in *Centennial Program, City of Logan, West Virginia, 1852-1952* (Logan, W.Va.: Logan Centennial Association, 1952).

[26] Simon, "The Development of Underdevelopment"; Thomas, "Coal Country"; Hecker, Sopher, Scott, Koslow, Pickus, Isadore Wein interviews; Jean Abrams Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va. (13 October 1996); "None Failed with Big Wad," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 19, 1915, p. 7.

[27] Crandall A. Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Mack Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field of Southern West Virginia, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972); Charles Kenneth Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979); John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On? The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

[28] Sopher interview; "The Coal Business Good," *McDowell Recorder*, July 9, 1915; "Dawn of New Era of Prosperity Acclaimed by Welch Merchants," *McDowell Recorder*, November 3, 1922; "Middlesborough: Some of Her Possibilities," *Middlesborough News*, October 4, 1902; "Year 1913: Banner Business Year," *McDowell Times*, December 26, 1913. Many of these articles shared the same theme: the coalfields have recently seen hard times, but a new era has arrived and prospects for the future are excellent.

[29] David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 10; Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*. The revisionist view is expressed in Price Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s," *Journal of Economic History* 46, no. 4 (December 1986): 1011-1029; and Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 183-184.

[30] Corbin, for example, cites letters to the *United Mine Workers Journal* in *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields.* The following discussion will cite other sources on the tactics used by company stores to pressure miners and limit independent competition. The revisionist view relies primarily on analysis of a single coal company, a hefty dose of neoclassic economic theory, and two governmental studies: the 1911 report of the U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, and the 1922 *Report of the United States Coal Commission* (Washington: GPO 1925). The two studies, however, are somewhat equivocal, presenting evidence on both sides.

[31] On the company store as focal point for coal town life, see Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns," 191-193; Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 212; James T. Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1933).

[32] Wallace Bennett, interview with Paul Niden, Oak Hill, W.Va. (1 October 1980) (transcript, p. 9, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.); "Discussion by Readers," *Coal Age* 8 (November 1915): 895; Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia: A Story*

of Industrial Conflict in the Coal Mines (New York: Arno Press, 1921), 28; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 311.

Government hearings convened to investigate coalfield labor turmoil provide contradictory evidence, with miners insisting that workers were fired for not trading at the company store and operators insisting that their employees were free to trade anywhere they pleased. See for example *West Virginia Coal Fields: Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, 67th Congress, First Session* (Washington: GPO, 1921), 76-79, 245-247, 286-287, 472, 502-503, 918. Oral histories, however, are fairly consistent. Here is another example, from a miner recalling the 1930s: "If they caught you trading, going to Harlan and trading in the store, instead of trading in the commissary, why, they'd run you off from here, they didn't take you back." Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 206.

[33] Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 189; Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 35; "Discussion by Readers," *Coal Age* 8 (November 1915): 813; E. H. Phipps, interview with Paul Niden, Beckley, W.Va. (16 August 1980) (transcript, p. 8, West Virginia and Regional History Collection); Janet W. Greene, "Strategies for Survival: Women's Work in the Southern West Virginia Coal Camps," *West Virginia History* 49 (1990): 37-54 (quote, 51). Similarly, an African American coal miner's daughter interviewed for this study recalled that her family shopped at a local grocery despite the coal company's disapproval. Frances Monroe, interview with author, Bluefield, W.Va. (27 April 1998).

[34] Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 225; Bernard Gottlieb, Weiner, Jean Abrams Wein, Albert, Sopher, Pickus interviews.

[35] Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 22; *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1462.

[36] B. F. Roden, "The Commissary: Its Indispensability," *Coal Age* 4 (1913): 240-241; "Company and Other Stores," *Coal Age* 8 (October 1915): 716; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 201; letter from W. J. Francis to Governor Walter G. Glasscock (Box 3, Glasscock Papers, West Virginia and Regional History Collection).

[37] *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1462-1463, 1466, 1514; Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 28.

[38] U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 201; Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 29; Farley, "One of the Faithful," 52; William D. Forester, *Before We Forget: Harlan County, 1920 through 1930* (n.p.: 1983), 25; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 309-310.

[39] Eiland interview; *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, "Company Store Seeks To Force Employees To Buy" and "Coercion Still Continues," December 22, 1915, and "Injunction Is Applied For by Coal Company," December 24, 1915; George Wolfe-Justus Collins correspondence, December 25 and 28, 1915 (Justus Collins Papers, West Virginia and Regional History Collection); Circuit Court records, McDowell County Courthouse, Welch, W.Va.

Despite the apparent public relations mess, Wolfe insisted that "the entire population of Welch [the local county seat] is with us." Indeed, the Welch newspaper defended the company against the attacks of the regional Bluefield paper, saying that the *Telegraph*'s editorial was "unjust, unfair, and untrue." *McDowell Recorder*, December 24, 1915.

[40] In his letters, Wolfe repeatedly (and somewhat obsessively) made reference to the "nine competitive stores" in Davy. (Wolfe-Collins correspondence, 1913 to 1915, Justus Collins Papers). Other sources reveal that at least three and possibly several more of those stores were Jewish-owned. Thomas C. Hatcher and Geneva Steele, eds., *The Heritage of McDowell County, West Virginia, 1858-1995* (War, W.Va.: McDowell County Historical Society, 1995), 49; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 118, 224; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1275; McDowell County manuscript census, 1910, 1920.

[41] Pickus interview; Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983), 135.

[42] Wolfe-Collins correspondence, December 28, 1915, Justus Collins Papers; Arthur Gleason, "Company-Owned Americans," *The Nation* (1920). As a result of serving as employer, landlord, policeman, health care provider, etc. to their workers, some coal operators developed an extremely proprietary attitude, coming to believe that their multi-faceted role entitled them to govern their employees' lives. Observed James Laing, employers naturally "feel that the company should have part of the miners' trade since it provides them with work." Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 311.

[43] Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns," 178.

[44] "Most Stupendous Land Deal Ever Pulled Off in Keystone," *McDowell Times*, January 12, 1917; Houston Kermit Hunter, "The Story of McDowell County," *West Virginia Review* 17, no. 7 (April, 1940): 165-169; "Northfork-Clark Is 1200 Town," *McDowell Recorder*, 30 June 1922; Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas*; Tazewell County Deed Indexes (Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia); Irving Alexander, "Jewish Merchants in the Coalfields" and "Wilcoe: The People of a Coal Town," *Goldenseal* 16 (Spring 1990): 28-35; Drosick, Gail Bank, Scott, Jean Abrams Wein interviews.

[45] Sylvan Bank, Pickus, Sopher, Eiland interviews; "Big Hotel," *McDowell Recorder*, May 3, 1912.

[46] "Company and Other Stores," 716; "Discussion by Readers," 812; *New York Times* quoted in Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 22. See also Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 308; Roden, "The Commissary," 240; "Store Checks vs. Thrift," *Coal Age* 8 (October 1915), 619.

[47] Wolfe-Collins correspondence, December 25 and 28, 1915, Justus Collins Papers; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 204; Shifflett, *Life Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 188; Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 22. On company store profits see also William Tams, interview with Richard M. Hadsell, Tams, W.Va. (9 June 1966) (transcript, p. 37, West Virginia and Regional History Collection). One company store operator interviewed by Laing revealed gross profits around 50 percent. "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 308.

[48] Contributors to *Coal Age* would not admit to coercion, but they did acknowledge that heavy users of the company store were favored, which in the end amounted to the same thing. One writer pointed out that miners who spent the most—and became the most indebted to the company—would naturally be placed in the most profitable sections of the mine, if only so that the company could be assured of being paid back. Indebted miners also would be the first to be called for overtime and the last to be laid off. Those who did not patronize the store were inevitably shunted aside. "It may not be the intention of the company to show favoritism, [but it is only natural for it to encourage debt payment] by every means in its power," one commentator stated. Inefficiencies resulted when the "improvident" miner realized that "more is to be gained by keeping in his employer's debt" than by working hard: "He counts on his indebtedness to the company as his best protection." Several correspondents saw this problem as the unhealthy result of a dependency on store profits. The solution was simple, according to one writer: the company store and the

coal business should be run as two entirely separate operations, with no administrative link between the two. *Coal Age* 8 (October-November, 1915), 716, 812-813.

Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 308. Shifflett writes, "The fact that a company store siphoned much of the payroll of the company back into the company's coffers while at the same time making a profit was a business arrangement of manifold importance, even at low returns." *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 188.

[49] Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'?," 1022; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 201; Glenn Massay, "Coal Consolidation: Profile of the Fairmont Field of Northern West Virginia, 1852-1903" (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1970).

[50] Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 182; Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'?"; Tams interview, 37; Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 25-26; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 312; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 202; *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1463. As Greene notes, "If a family had only scrip to spend, purchasing outside the coal camp could be difficult." ("Strategies for Survival," 49-51.)

[51] *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1462-1463, 1522; Koslow, Hecker, Sylvan Ban, Jean Abrams Wein, Isadore Wein, Gorsetman interviews; Esther Sturm Baloff, interview with Barbara Winick Bernstein and Marilyn Jacob Shore (20 May 1985) (Knoxville Jewish Community Archives Project, Knoxville Jewish Federation, Knoxville). See also Bennett interview, 9.

[52] None of the sources, by the way, mentioned Jewish scrip dealers. Laing offers the interesting observation that "the company doctor not infrequently adds scrip discounting to his professional services. . . . [It is] surprisingly lucrative." Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 282.

[53] Phipps interview, 31-32; Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 184; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 202; Alexander, "Wilcoe: The People of a Coal Town," 29; Greene, "Strategies for Survival," 51; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 282. Gorsetman, Scott, Sopher, Bernard Gottlieb, Sylvan Bank, Gail Bank, Weiner, Monroe, Jean Abrams Wein interviews; Billie Rakes, interview with author, Oak Hill, W.Va. (12 October 1996).

In West Virginia until the mid 1920s, the law required coal companies to redeem scrip, in cash, at full value, to anyone who brought it to the company store and wanted to exchange it. But penalties for non-compliance were minor and enforcement was lax, so company store operators universally disregarded the law, found journalist Winthrop Lane (*Civil War in West Virginia*, 28). George Wolfe once again provides supporting evidence. In a letter to Justus Collins he expressed concern that redeeming scrip in cash "would give the nine competitive stores at Davy the chance of their lives." Commenting on a 1915 state Supreme Court ruling that upheld the scrip law, he wrote, "as the matter is only a misdemeanor and at the most would not cost us over $100 we will make no change in our method of doing business until we look further into the matter." In the mid 1920s the state changed the law to allow companies to make their scrip non-transferable, so that they could refuse to take it from non-employees. In Virginia, coal operators had successfully lobbied for a similar law in 1919, according to Shifflett (184). The West Virginia law stayed on the books until 1975. Wolfe-Collins correspondence, Justus Collins Papers, March 23 and 26, 1915; West Virginia Code, 1891, 1923, 1927, 1973; Acts of the West Virginia Legislature, 1925, 1927, 1975.

[54] U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 202; Roden, "The Commissary," 241; Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 184; Weiner, Sopher, Gorsetman interviews.

[55] Both scrip and credit transactions invited abuse by independent merchants as well as coal companies. Like today's overly-aggressive credit card companies, some retailers worked to convince people to buy things they could not afford. But unlike huge corporations that engage in such practices, small coalfield retailers were vulnerable to loss and their tactics could easily backfire. One Jewish man who worked the southern West Virginia coal camps observed, "It was easy to sell to [miners] . . . but sometimes you'd have trouble collecting." His method of collection, used by other small retailers as well, shows how these independent entrepreneurs could become involved in the larger system of exploitation: he used the enforcement powers of local justices of the peace, who typically kept for themselves a portion of the monies they collected on his behalf. "It was nothing for me to have two or three justices of the peace to turn over my accounts to," he commented. "Of course, sometimes we had trouble collecting from the justice of the peace!"

[56] Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*, 189. Miners and their families had their own ways of using scrip to their advantage. For example, it was not uncommon for them to actually purchase scrip from scrip dealers—at marked-down prices—and use it in local company stores, thus, in effect, receiving a discount on their purchases. Rakes interview.

[57] *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1462; Bernard Gottlieb, Isadore Wein, Eiland, Scott, Jean Abrams Wein, Albert, Sopher, Pickus, Sylvan Bank, Mankoff, Weiner, Koslow, Gorsetman, Hecker interviews.

[58] U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 213; Eiland interview; Alexander, "Wilcoe: The People of a Coal Town," 30; Weiner, Sylvan Bank interviews. Jewish merchants sometimes helped non-English speaking miners in encounters with American bureaucracy, for example, by acting as an interpreter in court. This role hearkened back to Eastern Europe, where part of the relationship Jews had with their often-illiterate peasant neighbors included helping them deal with officialdom.

[59] Weiner, Jean Abrams Wein, Albert, Bernard Gottlieb, Sopher, Pickus, Rakes, Scott, Gorsetman interviews; Shackleford and Weinberg, "Our Appalachia," 225; Herman Monk, interview with Paul Niden, Beckley, W.Va. (1 October 1980) (transcript, p. 22, West Virginia and Regional History Collection); *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1461; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 212, 204. Some ten years after the Coal Commission study, Laing found a bigger gap between independent and company store prices than the Commission had. He attributed the discrepancy to the introduction of chain stores and a general lowering of prices in independent stores, while company stores continued their same pricing strategies. "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 309-310. See also Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns," 198-199.

[60] *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1460, 1463; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 201; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 308; Shackleford and Weinberg, *Our Appalachia*, 225; Drosick interview.

[61] Wolfe-Collins correspondence, December 25, 1915, Justus Collins Papers; *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 1461. Here, the Coal Commission ignored the many factors that allowed coal companies to undersell their competitors, if they so chose (though it mentions these factors elsewhere).

[62] McDowell County manuscript census, 1910, 1920; McDowell County naturalization records, McDowell County Courthouse; Hatcher and Steele, *Heritage of McDowell County*, 49; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 118, 224; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1275; Hecker interview.

On the marginality of small Jewish businesses see Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*; Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock"; Perlmann, "Beyond New York"; Rubinow, "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia," 561.

[63] Thomas, "Coal Country"; Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*. On coal company ownership of entertainment and service businesses, see Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*; Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns."

[64] Weiner, Eiland interviews. In contrast to the quiescence exhibited by coalfield merchants both Jewish and non-Jewish, merchants in Steelton, Pennsylvania, protested the local steel companies' use of scrip with petitions and other actions, and won some concessions. The difference attests to the nature of the hegemonic status that coal operators managed to attain in the southern coalfields. John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 10.

[65] Occupational database (see note 13). Because one man, Sam Polon, worked as a coal miner and later became a coal investor, the total number of coal industry positions held by Jews in the sample comes to thirty-six, while the total number of people comes to thirty-five.

[66] Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 232; McDowell County manuscript census, 1910, 1920; *McDowell Recorder*, September 29, 1911, and December 24, 1915; McDowell County naturalization records, 1918, McDowell County Courthouse; Weiner, Hecker, Gail Bank interviews; Mary Marsh Ofsa, phone interview with author, 26 March 1999.

[67] While it would be tempting to include Weisman, Levetsky, and Solomon in the study's database simply because of their names, this would not appreciably affect the database totals. Time constraints did not permit a close perusal of the thousands of coal camp census entries (often illegibly-written interpretations of names very foreign to the census takers) that listed birthplace or language as "Magyar," "Polish," or "Slovak." These three men (along with some others encountered during the research process) therefore stand as examples of a larger, though undetermined, number of people.

[68] *West Virginia Department of Mines Annual Reports* (Charleston: West Virginia Department of Mines, 1906 to 1930); *Kentucky Department of Mines Annual Reports* (Frankfort: Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1924 to 1926).

[69] Jewish real estate and insurance man S.P. Goodman of Williamson entered a partnership with H. H. Randolph, who owned coal land within the town limits. A 1922 contract informs that Goodman and Randolph "have placed on the said premises" a coal tipple, tracks, and "various other improvements" for mining coal, which they leased to W.F. Tony for cash and royalties of 50 cents per ton (S. P. Goodman file, 1922, Stokes papers, West Virginia and Regional History Collection). Local broker Moses Hyman traded in stocks, bonds, and real estate, including investments in coal companies such as Justus Collins's Superior Pocahontas Coal Company (*McDowell Recorder*, February 10, 1922). Also, at least two Jewish families owned land which they leased to coal companies. The Baach family purchased coal land in Mingo County which remained in the family for over half a century (Mingo County Deed Book 5, p. 136, Power of Attorney Book 1, p. 247-261, Mingo County Courthouse, Williamson, W.Va.).

[70] Letter from Thurmond City Recorder Nell Bannister to Abraham Shinedling, 1956 (Abraham I. Shinedling Collection, American Jewish Archives); Fayette County Deed Book 27, p. 571, Fayette County Criminal Court Index, Fayette County Order Book 8, p. 197, File 7583, Fayette County Courthouse, Fayetteville, W.Va.; *West Virginia Department of Mines Annual Reports*, 1905 to 1910; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 232.

[71] "I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It," *Every Friday*, September 23, 1949; "Keystone Men Organize Big Coal Company, Kimball Likewise" *McDowell Times*, November 16, 1917; *West Virginia Department of Mines Annual Reports*, 1917 to 1924; McDowell County Deed Book 76, p. 41, and Book 77, p. 271; Mingo County Deed Book 35, p. 7, 9, 394, Book 38, p. 144 and 149, and Book 45, p. 241; "Notice of Dissolution," *McDowell Recorder*, September 3, 1920.

[72] Sylvan Bank, Ken Bank interviews; Temple Goodman, phone interview with author, 21 February 1999; "I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It."

Jewish merchants in West Virginia's timber fields succumbed to the same temptation. In a letter to Abraham Shinedling, Fannie Golden Overholt wrote about her father, Paul Golden, who had started as a peddler in Pocahontas County and built up a thriving retail business in Marlinton in the 1890s: "My father always was fascinated by the lumber business, so when he sold his store out, he indulged in this and lost much of his hard-earned cash." He ended up leasing his timberland to local farmers, and went back on the road again at age 75 "as a jobber for work clothes and gloves. He traveled all over southern West Virginia and enjoyed his work very much." Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1014.

[73] Jennifer McDaniels, "Totz Experienced Boom, Bust Often Characterized by Coal Industry," Harlan County Heritage 13, *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, March 31, 1998; McDowell County manuscript census, 1920; phone conversation with Zelda Totz Appleman, 1999.

[74] "Jews in America," *Fortune*, February 1936, p. 133. Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," 66; Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 21.

[75] "I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It."

[76] Almost all the articles on Keystone fires mentioned losses to Jewish businesses. "Loss at Keystone," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, June 25, 1901. In the *McDowell Times*, see "Small Fire in Keystone," September 26, 1913; "Fifteen Thousand Dollar Fire in Keystone," June 26, 1914; "Keystone Scene of Big Fire," December 31, 1915; "Another Fire in Belcher Row," January 7, 1916; "FIRE! Destroys Three Buildings," July 21, 1916; "Big Fire," December 8, 1916; "Keystone Visited by Another Destructive Fire," April 20, 1917; "Another Fire in Keystone," May 4, 1917; "Fire Sweeps Business Section of Keystone," May 11, 1917; "Keystone Visited by Fearful Conflagration," January 11, 1918. In the *McDowell Recorder*, see "Fire Destroys Block at Keystone," March 3, 1916; "Blaze Destroys Business Block of Keystone," May 11, 1917; "Sixteen Houses Destroyed," November 12, 1920.

Articles about fires in other coalfield towns that mention losses to Jewish merchants include: "Firecracker Started Blaze," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 28, 1915; "Thurmond Hotel Burned Saturday," *Fayette Journal*, February 28, 1901; *Middlesboro News*, October 29, 1904. *McDowell Recorder*: "Disastrous Fire Sweeps Northfork," January 26, 1912; "Town of Anawalt Swept by Disastrous Fire," November 28, 1913; "Fire Destroys Part of Welch's Business Section," January 4, 1918; "Fire in Lopinsky's Northfork Store, September 1, 1922; "Fire Losses at Yukon," January 20, 1922. *McDowell Times*: "Origin of Fire at Northfork Still Mystery," January 4, 1918; "Clark Is Visited by a Destructive Fire," February 9, 1915.

[77] Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, interview with author, Parkersburg, W.Va., 18 December 1997.

[78] Sturm, Sylvan Bank interviews; Bessie Zolsman versus Louis Totz, 1909-1910, McDowell County Circuit Court records, McDowell County Courthouse; "Fifteen Thousand Dollar Fire in Keystone," *McDowell Times*, June 26, 1914, and "Keystone Visited by Another Destructive Fire," April 20, 1917.

[79] *McDowell Recorder*, legal notices, 1911-1922; James S. Olson, "The Depths of the Great Depression: Economic Collapse in West Virginia, 1932-1933," *West Virginia History* 38 (April 1977): 214, 221-223; William D. Forester, *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties* (n.p.: 1986), 113; Goodman, Sylvan Bank, Eiland, Ken Bank, Gail Bank, Pickus, Koslow, Hecker, Bernard Gottlieb, Fink interviews; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1298.

[80] Jean Abrams Wein, Sylvan Bank, Jaffe interviews; Tazewell County Deed Books 24, 32 (Virginia State Library). It is possible that Jacob Baach had suffered a previous bankruptcy and that his share of the business had been placed under his wife's name.

[81] Records, Hebrew Ladies Aid Society, Welch, W.Va. (American Jewish Archives); Pickus interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 328.

[82] Records, Jewish Ladies Guild, 1914-1922, and B'nai B'rith chapter, 1941-1944, Williamson, W.Va. (American Jewish Archives); Pickus interview.

The use of the term "Schnorrers Fund" hints at the lingering influence of Yiddish culture on coalfield Jews. Shnorrers occupied an established place in the social order of East European Jewry which carried over into the immigrant neighborhoods of the New World. Leo Rosten writes, "Every Jewish community once had at least one shnorrer. . . . Shnorrers were somehow regarded as performing a social function. Exactly what this function was, I could never fathom, as a child; but everyone seemed to take it for granted." *The Joys of Yiddish* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 360-361.

[83] Student Rabbi Questionnaire, 1935-1936 (Hebrew Union College Collection, American Jewish Archives); manuscript census, 1900, 1910; "Pocahontas Pickings," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 28, 1915; Ken Bank interview; Gail Bank interview; Scott interview.

[84] Sopher interview. For more on the geographic mobility of coalfield Jews, see chapter 2.

[85] Stephen G. Mostov has written that "the economic history of the nineteenth century German Jewish community in America has been described for too long in facile rags-to-riches terms." "Dun and Bradstreet Reports as a Source of Jewish Economic History: Cincinnati, 1840-1875," *American Jewish History* 72, no. 3 (1983): 333. The works cited here attempt to go beyond celebrations of economic mobility to analyze the up-and-down process that actually occurred. Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 52; Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," 74; Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock," 628-629; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 126; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 122-127; Perlmann, "Beyond New York," 375-377, 382.

[86] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 128; Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock,"630; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 126; Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*, 134. A memoir that provides a vivid description of East European economic instability is Carole Malkin, ed., *The Journeys of David Toback As Retold by His Granddaughter* (New York: Schocken, 1988). Studies of Jewries around the world document tendencies toward risk-taking entrepreneurship. See for example Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1999); Hugh Macmillan and Frank Shapiro, *Zion in Africa: The Jews of Zambia* (New York: I. B.

Tauris, 1999); Allan D. Meyers, "Ethnic Distinctions and Wealth among Colonial Jamaican Merchants, 1685-1716," *Social Science History* 22 (Spring 1998): 47-81.

[87] Mostov, "Dun and Bradstreet Reports as a Source of Jewish Economic History," 350-351; Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock," 627-630; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 68.

According to the ethnography of East European Jewry *Life Is with People*, "The shtetl folk feel that 'head,' *kop*—and especially '*yiddishe kop*'—is the chief capital in any enterprise, and sometimes the only one. . . . It is characterized by rapidity of orientation and grasping of a problem, intuitive perception, and swift application to the situation." Marc Zborowski and Elisabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952).

[88] Scott, Eiland, Pickus, Fink, Hecker interviews; *McDowell Recorder*, November 7, 1913; Marilou S. Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee," 1963 (unpublished manuscript, Williamson Public Library, Williamson, W.Va.).

[89] *Logan City Directory 1927* (n.p.); Harlan congregation records; "I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It"; Katzen, Weiner, Pickus, Bernard Gottlieb, Fink, Jean Abrams Wein, Gail Bank, Jaffe, Eiland interviews.

[90] Sopher interview; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 51; Hatcher and Steele, *Heritage of McDowell County*; *Bell County, Kentucky, History* (Paducah: Bell County Historical Society, 1994); Betty Ofsa Rosen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., 28 May 1996.

[91] Sopher interview; *West Virginia Jewry*, 328; Shelly Tenenbaum "Immigrants and Capital: Jewish Loan Societies in the United States, 1880-1945," *American Jewish History* 76 (September 1986): 67-77 ; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 56-57. During the Depression, one informant told Morawska, internal lending was so widespread that "everybody owed everybody" (128).

Jewish loan societies and informal lending customs were grounded in the biblical commandment to assist fellow Jews in reduced circumstances by providing interest-free loans (Exodus 22:24, Leviticus 25:35-37, Deuteronomy 23:20-21). Rabbi J. H. Hertz writes that such loans, which kept borrowers from "falling into destitution" while allowing them to "maintain themselves by their own industry," were considered "one of man's most meritorious deeds." Indeed, the twelfth century Jewish philosopher Maimonides asserted that the highest form of *tzedekah* consisted of helping others gain the capacity to help themselves. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1981), 314, 848-849.

On how other immigrant groups have developed and sustained mutual aid associations, see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Ivan H. Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare Among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

[92] Sopher interview; "Merchants To Close," *Mingo Republican*, April 21, 1911. Several interviewees stated that rivalries among Jewish families sometimes resulted in intense dislike. One person recalled living in a coalfield town that had only a handful of Jews, who had little to do with each other: "We didn't like each other because we were competitors. . . . We hated them!" The communal implications of Jewish economic cooperation and economic conflict will be explored in chapter 5.

[93] Jerome Goodman versus D. M. Klein, *West Virginia Supreme Court Reports* (1920), 292-300.

[94] Jaffe interview; *McDowell Recorder*, May 3, 1912.

[95] Baltimore Bargain House catalogues, 1900, 1906, 1920 (Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore); Lester S. Levy, *Jacob Epstein* (Baltimore: Maran Press, 1978); Fink and Weiner interviews; *McDowell Times*, June 5, 1917; *McDowell Recorder*, September 15, 1922. Not all Baltimore Bargain House clients were Jewish, but Epstein's biography stresses the importance of Jewish retailers to the firm's business.

[96] Bernard Gottlieb, Jean Abrams Wein, Fink interviews; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 16 (quote), 34; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 76.

[97] Rosen, Sopher, Weiner, Baloff, Bernard Gottlieb, Sylvan Bank, Scott, Koslow, Pickus, Albert, Gail Bank, Fink, Hecker, Katzen, Mankoff, Jean Abrams Wein interviews; Harry Berman, interview with John C. Hennen, Jr., Williamson, W.Va. (15 and 28 June 1989) (transcript, p. 51, Matewan Oral History Project, Matewan Development Center, Matewan, W.Va.); Alexander, "Wilcoe: The People of a Coal Town"; manuscript census records, 1900-1920; *Beckley City Directory*, 1932, 1940.

[98] Pickus, Albert, Bernard Gottlieb, Baloff interviews; manuscript census, 1900-1920. Ewa Morawska similarly notes that the phrase "helping out" covered a lot of ground and served to maintain "the public image of subordination" of women. In reality, she quotes one respondent, "'The men knew how important women were [in business], but in those days you did not come out and say it.'" *Insecure Prosperity*, 102.

[99] On immigrant group attitudes and practices regarding women's work, see Bodnar, *The Transplanted*; Judith E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900 – 1940* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985). On attitudes toward Jewish women's work in Eastern Europe and America, see Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1976); Irene D. Neu, "The Jewish Businesswoman in America," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1976): 137-154; Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*; Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995). Sopher, Fink, Betty Schuchat Gottlieb interviews.

[100] Manuscript census, 1910, 1920, McDowell, Mingo, Bell Counties; *Beckley City Directory*, 1932, 1940; *Kitts' City and Coalfield Directory* (Bluefield, W.Va.: City Directory Co., 1904); *Bluefield City Directory*, 1910, 1915 (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co.); *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1900, 1904, 1910, 1914 (Pittsburgh: R. L. Polk & Co.); Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 383, 803, 1102, 1302; Abraham I. Shinedling and Manuel Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community* (Beckley, W.Va.: Biggs-Johnston-Withrow, 1955), 20, 44, 56; Deed Books, Raleigh County Courthouse, Beckley, W.Va.; *Williamson Daily News*, 6 February 1920, p. 4; *McDowell Recorder*, September 3, 1920; Albert, Mankoff, Koslow interviews.

A complication in assessing business ownership among women is that men who underwent bankruptcies often put subsequent ventures under their wives' names. But despite this practice, newspaper articles, interviews, and other sources reveal that many Jewish businesses were genuinely operated by women. At least twenty-six female Jewish business proprietors were identified.

On immigrant Jewish women as American entrepreneurs, see Neu, "The Jewish Businesswoman in America," and Baum, et al., *The Jewish Woman in America*. In "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," Norton B. Stern comments on the "very high proportion" of female entrepreneurs in mid-nineteenth century Eureka, Nevada, especially as compared to cities such as Los Angeles (65).

[101] Rosen, Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, Mankoff interviews; manuscript census, 1920.

[102] One lawsuit that Bessie was involved in ended up in the West Virginia Supreme Court, which overturned a decision against her and sent the matter back for re-trial. While the outcome of most of her court battles could not be ascertained, at least one case was settled out of court after many years, perhaps out of the weariness of all concerned. For more on Bessie Zaltzman, see chapter 4. McDowell County manuscript census, 1900; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 986; Circuit Court records 1902, 1909, 1910, Deed Books 36, 79, 92, 93, 101, 102, 105, 112, 132, 159, Will Book 6, 496, McDowell County Courthouse; "Zolsman vs. Totz," *West Virginia Supreme Court Reports* 74 (June 1914), 604-606.

[103] American-born Jews, especially men, quickly adopted middle class norms that restricted married women to the domestic sphere. (Baum, et al., contend that women's resistance to their new, more dependent role led to the rise of the stereotype of Jewish women as domineering and "shrewish.") While nationally the transformation began as early as the 1920s, it would appear that it happened somewhat later in the coalfields, given the significant amount of economic activity demonstrated by Jewish women in the 1920s and 1930s. Baum, et al., *The Jewish Woman in America*, 189-204; Smith, *Family Connections*; Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*; Neu, "The Jewish Businesswoman in America"; Evans, *The Provincials*, 255-262.

Albert, Fink, Koslow, Rosen interviews; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1007, 1294; Marino, *Welch and Its People*; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; *Beckley City Directory*, 1940; *Williamson, West Virginia, City Directory*, 1952; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 62.

[104] Albert, Baloff, Bernard Gottlieb, Koslow interviews.

[105] Albert interview; Andrew Heinze, "Jewish Street Merchants and Mass Consumption in New York City, 1880-1914," *American Jewish Archives* 41 (1989): 199-214 (quote, 208). Somehow, having a *yiddishe kop* didn't help the merchants who entered the coal business.

[106] Scott and Isadore Wein interviews; Wendy Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 32; Suberman, *The Jew Store*, 59, 122.

Along with pride in their retail talents came a belief that non-Jews lacked commercial savvy. Suberman relates her father's reaction on hearing how a gentile-owned dry goods store had gone out of business. "Their fatal flaw had been that they had too many clerks and never the right sizes," he was told. "Goyim, my father said to himself" (59). Another passage suggests, though, that the belief in superior Jewish commercial skill was confined to a relatively narrow sector. A Nashville merchant lectured her father, "Do you know what it means for a town to be without a Jewish dry goods? . . . What do goyim know from small dry goods? From small ready-to-wear? Groceries, yes. Furniture, maybe. Hardware, definitely. But small dry goods? *Never*!" (52).

[107] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 39, 51- 52.

[108] Sopher, Gorsetman interviews.

[109] *McDowell Recorder*, January 2, 1914; *McDowell Times*, August 11, 1916; manuscript census, 1900-1920; *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1898-1914; *Logan City Directory*, 1927; *Beckley City Directory*, 1940; *Williamson, West Virginia, City Directory*, 1952; Sylvan Bank interview.

[110] Pickus, Bernard Gottlieb interviews.

[111] Heinze, "Jewish Street Merchants," 208; Sopher and Scott interviews.

[112] *Fayette Journal*, June 28, 1900, and June 12, 1902; *Mingo Republican*, January 20, 1911; *McDowell Times*, May 18, 1917.

[113] Garret Mathews, "Ashes, Memories Have Settled on Keystone's Cinder Bottom," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 26, 1975; McDowell County circuit court records, McDowell County Courthouse; Mingo County circuit court records, Mingo County Courthouse; *West Virginia Supreme Court Reports*, vols. 55, 64, 71, 78, 87.

[114] Heinze, "Jewish Street Merchants," 208. The biblical passages that Talmudic law based its commercial precepts on include Leviticus 19:35 and 25:14 and Deuteronomy 25:13-15.

[115] Christine Carr McGuire, phone interview with author (November 1998); Sopher, Scott, Rakes, Baloff, Koslow, Jean Abrams Wein, Isadore Wein, Koslow interviews; Berman interview, p. 43; *Fayette Journal*, April 16, 1900; *Middlesboro News*, March 21, 1903; "Jacob Effron," *Thousandsticks*, January 2, 1913.

[116] Joe William Trotter Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 161-164. Local history books such as Marino's *Welch and Its People* cite many businesses owned by Italians, Greeks, African Americans, Hungarians, Poles, and other ethnic groups. See also Farley, "To Keep Their Faith Strong."

[117] Ron Lane and Ted Schempf, *Sewell: A New River Community* (Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1985); *Bell County, Kentucky, History*; Alexander, "Jewish Merchants in the Coalfields"; Marino, *Welch and Its People*; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[118] Sopher, Sturm, Sylvan Bank interviews; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 7.

[119] Albert, Sopher, Scott, Sturm, Koslow, Bernard Gottlieb, Eiland, Pickus, Fink, Weiner interviews; Feingold, *A Time for Searching*, 125; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 72-73.

[120] Occupational database (see note 13).

[121] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 67; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1298; "Middlesboro History" column, *Middlesboro Daily News*, March 30, 1990. Deed Books and Will Books, Tazewell, Raleigh, Mingo, Logan Counties; Marino, *Welch and Its People*; *Bell County, Kentucky, History*.

[122] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Thomas, "Coal Country"; Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis"; Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*. For studies beyond the Central Appalachian region see for example Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in an Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1985; John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1986; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1983; for a broad overview see Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978).

[123] Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 160 (first quote), 105; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93-94; David Jaffee, "Peddlers of

Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860," *Journal of American History* (September 1991), 511-535 (quote, 535). See also Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (January 1989): 120-144. On the role of women, see Lu Ann Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce in the Rural New South," *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 2 (May 2000): 297-320.

According to Barron, a full-blown consumer culture came to fruition in American society in the 1920s. He defines it as "a dramatic shift from a social ethos that emphasized individual autonomy and personal identity based on production to a culture that stressed mass consumption and defined personal satisfaction in terms of the purchase of commodities" (193).

[124] Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 240; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 93-94.

[125] Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (rev. ed., Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 9; Thomas J. Schlereth, "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.), 373; Lewis Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-bellum South," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19, no. 1 (February 1945), 35; Jackson Lears, "Beyond Veblen: Rethinking Consumer Culture in America," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, 78. Thomas D. Clark's *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944) is the classic account of the role of the country store in southern life. Virtually all historical accounts of peddlers (see note below) contain similar vivid descriptions of the peddler's visit to a rural home.

[126] Lears, "Beyond Veblen," 79-80; Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 160; Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce," 300, 302; Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress," 527. See also Thomas D. Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South," in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973) and Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising."

[127] Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994), 46; Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 164.

The role of Jews and other minorities in the spread of capitalism has been considered by many social theorists. Some scholars have sought an explanation in the cultural characteristics of these groups. However, Fernand Braudel offers two simple reasons why numerous minorities (of varying religions, ethnicities, and cultures) have served as catalysts for economic change through the ages. First, in agrarian societies where trade is looked down upon, "it is surely the social machinery itself which reserves to 'outsiders' such unpleasant but socially essential tasks" as money-lending and money-handling. Thus minorities frequently occupy the most dynamic sectors of the economy. Second, they are often foreigners and by definition come equipped with "solid and ready-made networks" that extend beyond the boundaries of their host societies. Such networks are well positioned to serve a critical function in capitalist evolution: the linking of local and distant markets. *The Wheels of Commerce* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 166-167.

On the role of Jews and other minorities in capitalism see Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism: Poland and its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, eds., *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*; Aleksander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

[128] Clark, "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South,"; Levinson, *The Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 29, 37 (quote); Earl Pomeroy, "On Becoming a Westerner," in *Jews of the American West*, 194-212; Stephen J. Whitfield, "Commercial Passions: The Southern Jew as Businessman," *American Jewish History* 71 (1981-1982): 342-357, quotes 343, 356. On Jews and small town dry goods stores see also Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 4, 128-129.

In *The Jew Store*, Stella Suberman offers a colorful description of some rural inhabitants who were more than ready to receive the products brought by Jewish entrepreneurs. Regarding the opening of her father's small dry goods store in a western Tennessee town, she writes, "It was clear the farmers were delighted to have such a store to trade in. One man, eyes squinting as if he were still in the field under a glaring sun, told my father, 'Lord help us if Miz Turnpaugh ain't been as excited as a pup. I reckoned if you didn't open up soon, I'd have to ice her down'" (122).

[129] Heinze, "Jewish Street Merchants," 200-201; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113-114, 157; Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 11. New York City's other immigrant groups had street vendors, but they mostly dealt in foodstuffs, says Heinze. Jews "constituted a majority of the peddlers in Manhattan" and "practically monopolized" the dry goods trade.

[130] Heinze, "Jewish Street Merchants," 212; McGuire and Drosick interviews.

[131] Greene, "Strategies for Survival"; Shifflett, *Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns*; Ronald L. Lewis, "Appalachian Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Coal, Culture, and Social Change in West Virginia," *Urban Studies* 30, no. 2 (1993): 299-308; Alexander, "Wilcoe: The People of a Coal Town."

[132] John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 90-91; Bernard Gottlieb interview.

[133] Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*, 190, 202.

[134] Baltimore Bargain House catalogue, 1906; Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, Mankoff, Pickus interviews; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 3-4.

[135] Jean Abrams Wein, Sopher, Gorsetman interviews; Meyer, *One Hundred Years: An Anthology of Charleston Jewry*, 33.

[136] Manuscript census, McDowell, Fayette, Tazewell, Bell Counties, 1900, 1910; *McDowell Recorder*, September 5, 1922; Hatcher and Steele, *Heritage of McDowell County*, 40; *Fayette Journal*, 1900-1906; Koslow, Jean Abrams Wein interviews.

[137] *Bell County Republican*, August 2, 1902; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1020.

[138] *Fayette Journal*, August 8, 1901; *McDowell Recorder*, October 16, 1914.

[139] Heinze, "Jewish Street Merchants," 209-211, Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 41.

[140] Schlereth, "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues," 350; Baltimore Bargain House catalogue, 1906.

[141] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 51; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 87; Schlereth, "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues," 373.

[142] *Fayette Journal*, April 12, 1900; *Mingo Republican*, March 17, 1911; April 14, 1911; *McDowell Recorder*, December 15, 1911; April 16, 1915; April 30, 1915; June 4, 1920.

[143] *Middlesborough News*, December 16, 1899.

[144] "Weinstein Brothers," *Middlesborough News*, March 21, 1903; various issues, *Fayette Journal*, *McDowell Recorder*, *McDowell Times*, *Mingo Republican*, *Middlesboro News*, *Harlan Enterprise*.

[145] Weiner, Eiland, Drosick interviews.

[146] "Attention Called to Jewish Holidays," *McDowell Recorder*, September 15, 1922, p. 3. "Some Things Welch Has," *McDowell Recorder*, July 9, 1915; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 109.

[147] Chapter 4 will consider the impact of Jewish residents on other aspects of coalfield development aside from their role as retailers (such as town building).

[148] Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). This depiction bears an uncanny resemblance to Hillel Levine's portrayal of the early modern Polish nobility, whose determination to maintain their feudal hegemony led to a "failure to modernize" which doomed their lands to peripheral status. They guided their region into the world market as a supplier of grain but failed to invest in local economic development. When they began to suffer from competition from more advanced producers, they simply intensified their exploitation of the peasantry. Levine's discussion of how they chose to make up for economic decline resembles the strategy pursued by coal operators to make up for an unreliable coal market. Just as coal companies tried to recoup by urging their workers to purchase at the company store, landowners insisted that their peasants consume increasing amounts of the grain they produced—generally in the form of alcohol. As agents for the nobility, Jewish tavern keepers bore the brunt of the criticism for this phenomenon. Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism*.

[149] Wilma Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 233. Critics on both left and right have a long history of blaming merchants for the evils of capitalism. Scholars who have explored this animus note the traditional suspicion of traders that rural societies throughout the world have exhibited. They also point out that merchants are the most visible representatives of economic change as a society shifts to a market-based system. While the "middleman" position offers opportunities for exploitation which many people have acted upon, the tendency to view merchants in categorically negative terms is at best ahistorical, at worst, dangerous—especially since the middleman role has often been held by minorities, easy scapegoats for economic ills. Daniel Chirot notes that in much sociological analysis, especially Marxist literature, "there is a considerable strain of anti-semitism that takes the form of an attack on, or at least a dismissal of, the utility of petty commerce and usury, which are seen as inherently parasitical and unclean. . . . The hatred of markets and capitalist activity easily lapses into blame of minority entrepreneurs for serving the interests of the oppressive elites." See Daniel Chirot, "Conflicting Identities and the Dangers of Communalism," 30, in Chirot and Reid, *Essential Outsiders*. See also essays in that volume by Anthony Reid and Hillel Kieval, and Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*.

On a less sinister note, historians such as Allen Kulikoff ("The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America") point out that the rural transition to capitalism debate suffers from a romanticization of the

self-sufficient yeoman, whose sturdy lifestyle is seen as being destroyed by contact with the market. But preindustrial America was no utopia. Especially when gender issues are added to the mix, the picture looks quite different.

[150] Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, 166-167; Chirot and Reid, *Essential Outsiders*; Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle*; Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America*, 17.

[151] Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress"; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce"; Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America." See also Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

[152] Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 90-91.

[153] See for example Homer Hickam, *October Sky* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1999).

[154] Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 517; McCoy and Brown, "Appalachian Migration to Midwestern Cities," 35-36. McCoy and Brown note that Southern Appalachia lost three million people between 1940 and 1970. Their definition of Southern Appalachia includes the coalfields (which other studies, including this one, have described as the Central Appalachian plateau). Most of the population loss noted by McCoy and Brown occurred in the coalfield sub-section.

[155] Sheskin, "The Dixie Diaspora," 68, 70. Scholars have been arguing against Appalachian "exceptionalism" for decades. One essay collection that does so within the context of deindustrialization and out-migration is Phillip J. Obermiller and William W. Philliber, eds., *Appalachia in an International Context: Cross-National Comparisons of Developing Regions* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994).

[156] Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 16; Billings and Blee, *The Road to Poverty*.

Chapter 4

Social Implications of an Ethnic Economic Niche

> The figure of "Uncle Joe" Herzbrun is well remembered by thousands of people in the coalfields. This diminutive little man who operated a tailor shop in Welch for a quarter of a century, a native of Austria and a man with a warm heart, was an outstanding member of his race in the struggling period of McDowell County's growing pains. Uncle Joe knew everyone, and everyone knew him—the age-old type of human being whose sense of moral values tempered business and civic relations at all times. . . . For many years he assisted in the efforts of his people to establish a synagogue in the city. *West Virginia Review*, 1940[1]

As in Eastern Europe, Jews in the Central Appalachian coalfields differed from their neighbors in two important realms: religion and economic activity. In the old country these distinctions worked together to reinforce the status of the Jewish population as an oft-despised "other." Such would not be the case in the coalfields, where Jews would become stalwart members of a small middle- to upper-middle class centered in the region's county seat towns. This position would not make them immune to social tensions related to their ethnic, religious, and economic distinctiveness. Yet during the over half-century that Jewish communities flourished in the coalfields, Jews integrated fully into the region's social life.

Hungarian immigrant Josef Herzbrun and his extended family offer a conspicuous example. In addition to serving on the City Council, this owner of Welch's first tailoring establishment helped found the town's Chamber of Commerce and First National Bank. When his sister-in-law Pauline Josephy died in 1920 the Welch newspaper eulogized her as "one of the most popular ladies of the city . . . prominent in social, religious, and charitable circles." Charlie Albert moved

to Williamson, West Virginia, with his Russian immigrant parents as a teenager around 1921. For decades he owned Albert's Army-Navy Store and was active in just about every organization imaginable, from the Masons, Elks, and American Legion to the Chamber of Commerce, Salvation Army, and Boy Scouts. The town officially recognized his civic leadership with the declaration of "Charles Albert Day" in 1985, and he even received an award from that supreme arbiter of small-town respectability, the Daughters of the American Revolution.[2]

Beyond the county seats, Jews were also key members of the emerging middle class in boomtowns and smaller independent towns. A 1909 photograph printed in a local history of Pocahontas, Virginia, depicts a coal mine manager, a company doctor, a prosperous farmer, the town undertaker (member of a long-established family), and German-Jewish merchant Michael Bloch, over the caption, "Pocahontas Pioneers." Dime store owner Sam Rosen, a "vibrant, alert, public-spirited man," served as school board member, recorder, and finally mayor of Northfork, West Virginia, from the 1920s to 1940s. The Weinsteins of Middlesboro, Kentucky, received much recognition for their involvement "in every public enterprise and movement, the purpose of which is for the betterment and improvement of living, social, educational, and civic conditions." The brothers were for some years, "with the exception of the large corporations" (quite a significant exception), the largest tax payers in the city.[3]

But it would be misleading to represent Jews only as sober-minded, progressive business people and staid civic leaders. Some engaged in more adventurous activities, such as McDowell County prohibition officer Isadore Katzen, whose daring exploits in pursuit of bootleggers were eagerly chronicled by the local press. Coalfield Jewish communities harbored their fair share of sinners as well. Ike Ginsburg, a Kentucky colonel whose interests ran to bootlegging and gambling, served as mayor of Middlesboro in the mid-1930s. He presided over a "wide open city

. . . filled with liquor establishments, gambling joints, and hotels with beautiful prostitutes," with a grand jury accusing his administration of "intentionally allowing such places to continue operation." Ginsburg's cousin Jake Zuta lived in town for several years before departing for a career as a Chicago mobster; he came back every year to visit his Kentucky relatives. After his assassination in a 1930 gangland hit, Zuta's body was returned to Middlesboro, where it was laid out at Callison's Funeral Parlor. Ginsburg warned "'Chicago hoodlums'" to "'stay away'" from his cousin's funeral, which was conducted according to Orthodox Jewish ritual and was well-attended by local townspeople. Zuta was laid to rest in Middlesboro's Jewish cemetery.[4]

From respectable leading citizens to exemplars of the seamier side of coalfield life, Jews played a wide-ranging role in the social scene. Their activities contrast with the comportment of some other small American Jewish communities. Chroniclers of Jewish life such as Eli Evans in the South and Ewa Morawska in the North stress how small, insecure Jewish communities attempted to blend into their surroundings by trying not to be too conspicuous. On the other hand, the experience of coalfield Jews has decided parallels to the story of Jews in the American West, where scholars find similar patterns of participation in social, civic, and political life. Regional, demographic, and structural factors all influenced how Jews interacted with the surrounding non-Jewish population. This chapter will examine the place of Jews in the evolving social structure of the southern coalfields and attempt to locate their experience in the broad context of small town Jewry.[5]

A Boomtown Atmosphere: Jews and the Emerging Coalfield Middle Class

As Central Appalachia industrialized, a rigid social structure developed based primarily on work hierarchies within the coal industry. Coalfield historians note how the very layout of

company-owned towns reflected the new order. At the same time, however, the evolving social scene in the region's *independent* towns belied the class system solidifying around it. In a milieu where newcomers from many different backgrounds gathered to advance themselves any way they could, relative social fluidity prevailed.[6]

Even writers who have described the extreme imbalance of power in the coalfields and the stark inequalities that resulted have acknowledged how the coal boom fostered a wide open atmosphere that implied possibilities for social and economic mobility to people who flocked to the independent towns. In *Power and Powerlessness*, John Gaventa offers this description of the founding of Middlesboro: "A boom was created, a period of rapid economic and social change, a time of flux." As a result, "for a brief, critical juncture . . . the social structure appeared fluid." He identifies four "classes" who participated in the boom: absentee owners, their local representatives, workers, and "a host of small entrepreneurs, merchants, and professionals who saw in this venture the chance to make a new start." To Gaventa, social fluidity was more perceived than real, however:

> Within that boom, economic inequalities and monopoly control were also created, though the Zeitgeist of the era may not have brought them into the focus of the thousands of small entrepreneurs, workers and mountaineers who had been attracted to the city. . . . There is no indication that the mobility here was the upward mobility for which frontier boomtowns enjoy a reputation. Rather, it was of a horizontal nature. [7]

Yet the history of coalfield Jewish communities suggests that county seats and instant towns such as Pocahontas, Middlesboro, and West Virginia's Keystone did indeed resemble the boomtowns of other "frontiers."[8] Certainly a clear distinction existed between the towns' large working class and the small but occupationally varied middle class of merchants, professionals, white collar workers, and middle-to-upper level railroad and coal industry employees. In

independent towns, however, upward mobility would not prove impossible. Moreover, for Jews and other members of the multi-ethnic coalfield middle class, the period of opportunity lasted longer than the "brief juncture" Gaventa describes, sustained by occasional booms that boosted the region's economic fortunes. Meanwhile, the physical absence of the most powerful class did, as Gaventa suggests, make the independent towns appear less stratified than they actually were. The effect was to heighten the impression of openness often associated with boomtowns.[9]

In the popular imagination, boomtowns have been known mostly as places where various legal and illegal forms of vice flourish. But historians have also talked about them as spaces where the freewheeling social atmosphere, diversity of population, and desire of local boosters to achieve economic development have promoted an unusual degree of tolerance and opportunity for a wide variety of people. Coalfield towns conformed to a pattern evident from historical accounts of Jewish communities in places as far flung as Odessa, Russia, and Wichita, Kansas: "fledgling" cities, where entrepreneurial spirit runs high and the social hierarchy is not well-fixed, have often proven hospitable to Jews.[10]

As historian Earl Pomeroy writes about the nineteenth century American West, Jews were welcome "above all in villages and towns ambitious to become cities. Elites were less jealous of their turf and more hospitable to strangers in new and expanding communities." Local businessmen "commonly thought of newcomers as potential customers and fellow promoters in an expanding economy rather than as competitors in a static one." Jews in particular were well-received, since they arrived with attributes that seemed to match western economic needs: commercial experience and economic networks, invaluable for importing goods to relatively remote areas. Jewish entrepreneurs received much favorable coverage in small-town western newspapers, whose editors admired and respected them for their business endeavors. Articles

commonly praised and encouraged local investment by Jews, relating with approval their plans to expand their businesses, construct new buildings, and the like.[11]

Within the coalfields, the booster language of local newspapers often reflected the tendency of boomtowns to accept newcomers of all backgrounds because they contributed to regional progress. One 1912 article even drew the comparison to a more well-known frontier: "The population is quite cosmopolitan. . . . Somewhat like the great West, the welcome is extended to all." Of course, Jews were only one of many different immigrant groups who flocked to the coalfields. Their numbers paled beside the throngs of Southern, Central, and Eastern Europeans who came to mine the coal. Immigrants from the British Isles (who worked disproportionately in the upper levels of the coal industry), African Americans and whites from other parts of the South, and transplants from Pennsylvania and Ohio round out the list of "outsiders" to the region. Meanwhile, "native whites" from West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia remained the predominant group. All this diversity augured well for the small Jewish contingent: historians have noted a worldwide tendency that Jews are more accepted in heterogeneous places where their religion and culture do not stand out as the sole contrast to a prevailing local norm.[12]

And, as in the burgeoning towns of the West, commercially-minded Jewish immigrants seemed to be especially appreciated in the coalfields. A 1900 *Fayette Journal* (West Virginia) article enthused that "Hurvitz & Lopinsky, the justly popular proprietors of the Great Eastern Bargain House, at Sewell . . . will shortly open up the largest and best selected line of clothing, dry goods, boots and shoes . . . ever seen in this part of the state. . . . The square dealing and up-to-date methods of this enterprising firm are too well known to need any comment." When Joseph Lopinsky died in 1914, newspapers mourned his passing. The *McDowell Recorder*, newspaper of record in the county that contained the region's largest Jewish population into the

1920s, occasionally printed articles extolling local Jewish businessmen. For example, when the "well known jeweler" Henry Millner of Welch, owner of "one of the prettiest and best equipped stores in the state," became certified in optometry in 1915, the *Recorder* found it "another proof of what can be accomplished by a determined young man though working under adverse circumstances." The paper soberly noted that Millner, orphaned at age fifteen, was "Hebrew born and reared in the land where the persecution of his race is notorious." A special favorite of the *Recorder's* editor was real estate developer Sam Polon, described on several occasions as "our redheaded Jew and all around hustler." Polon, too, had a rags-to-riches tale recounted in one 1913 article that summed up, "American boys, take a lesson from this."[13]

The instructive example of such self-made men no doubt held special appeal for members of the pre-existing local elite intent on transforming a rural mountain society based on communal, agrarian values into a modern society ruled by individualism and an ethic of progress. As described by author Mary Beth Pudup, town-based descendants of the region's wealthiest farming families formed the "nucleus of the mountain middle class." As merchants, professionals, and public officials, they worked diligently to promote economic development. Yet, few in number and lacking in financial resources, they could not "underwrite a capitalist transformation" on their own. Scholars have focused on the successful attempts of local elites to draw outside capital into the region through their promotion of the coal industry, but the Jewish experience suggests that their openness to outsiders extended to small retailers as well as industrial capitalists. As in the West, the commercial sector was extremely small at first and its members needed the new arrivals to help achieve their goal. Most Jews may not have arrived with capital, but they had something almost as valuable: access to credit. They also had experience in trade, wholesale connections, and entrepreneurial ambitions, all important assets in

advancing the region's commercial life. Moreover, they shared in the desire for economic progress—a stance that, in a region where capitalist values were not uncontested, the local elite found congenial. Thus Jews and other entrepreneurial newcomers were absorbed into the coalfield middle class. As Pudup puts it, "longtime residents and newly established families could merge their interests and define an identity as local boosters for capitalist development."[14]

Members of the region's commercial sector gravitated to the county seat towns, those fast-growing centers of government and commerce. A "social and spatial" transformation took place as business and civic leaders oversaw the creation of town infrastructures and the formation of commercial districts, usually ranged around the courthouse. They also developed new residential areas and promoted the establishment of schools and churches.[15] Although the county seats became the bastion of the coalfield bourgeoisie, other independent towns also hosted a small middle class whose members were equally concerned with developing infrastructures, business possibilities, and social amenities. These towns often abutted coal mines and the local coal company usually owned that part of town where its operations were centered, including housing for miners and their families. Boosterism prevailed as well in these independent towns; for example, Keystone's African American-owned *McDowell Times* was every bit as strident in promoting growth as its white counterparts in Welch, Logan, Williamson, and Beckley.[16]

Jewish men and women enthusiastically contributed to the economic, social, and civic life of coalfield towns, from county seats to classic boomtowns such as Keystone, Pocahontas, and Middlesboro, to small independent towns such as Kimball and War, West Virginia. Their motivations ranged from enlightened to less-than-enlightened self-interest to a belief in the virtue and necessity of contributing to their community. The Jewish principle of *tzedekah* (the

communal obligation to help others)—the same principle that guided their efforts to assist their fellow Jews and organize their own communal institutions—contributed to their sense of civic duty. In 1974, Jerome Paul David wrote his rabbinical thesis on the Jewish community of Williamson. He noted that "Jews are very active in the organizational life of Williamson. They not only give of their time but also of their money. . . . They do so because they feel it is their duty as citizens." As one man told him, "'I'm involved in everything that pertains to the community in general. This is my home and town and I feel any contribution that will better our town, I will work on.'"[17]

The willingness of Jews to participate in civic life was matched by the willingness of their fellow citizens to welcome that participation—not only during the early years of the coal boom, but later as well. Melvin Sturm returned to the coalfields as a young man in the late 1940s and took over his late father's business in Jellico, Tennessee (near Middlesboro). He soon found himself recruited into the town's civic activities. His college education made him "sort of a rarity" and he became, in short order, city council member and Kiwanis Club president. Not yet thirty years old, in 1952 he was elected mayor. Sturm came from a three-generation family tradition of involvement in coalfield society. His aunt, Esther Sturm Baloff, had settled with her husband in LaFollette, Tennessee, around 1920. Among other things, during the Depression she organized what became the school lunch program by cooking soup in a big pot on her stove and having her sons walk it over to the schoolhouse. As she stated matter-of-factly in an oral history interview taped in the 1980s, "I was head of everything practically that needed help."[18]

The wide scope for civic participation offered by coalfield towns enabled some Jewish residents to earn recognition as public figures. A few businessmen even became honorary "colonels." When West Virginia Governor Henry Hatfield bestowed the title on Joseph Lopinsky

and former-peddler-turned-merchant Harry Bank in 1914, the *McDowell Recorder* noted that "Mr. Bank's appointment is pleasing his many friends in this section, who think he merits the honor because he is a substantial man of business and was a very ardent supporter of the Governor during his campaign." (The "very ardent" political support was the decisive factor: both Bank and Lopinsky campaigned prominently for Hatfield.) A third Jewish coalfield "colonel," Middlesboro's Ike Ginsburg, serves as a reminder that eminence in the coalfields could be achieved under circumstances that were questionable, at best. [19]

Despite the prominence of a few, most Jewish coalfield residents left barely a trace of their activities. Nevertheless, they helped shape the physical contours of their communities through their town-building activities. A close look reveals their hidden history.

Jews as Town Builders

As discussed in previous chapters, the prevalence of absentee ownership stunted any kind of development—economic, civic, or otherwise—unrelated to coal extraction. Non-resident owners had little interest in activities that did not directly advance their bottom line. In contrast, as both residents and capitalists, Jews did have a direct interest in promoting measures to increase the livability and viability of their towns. Substantial brick buildings adorned with Jewish family names survive to this day in commercial districts across the coalfields: the Schwachter Building in Williamson, the Catzen Building in Northfork, the Weinstein Building in Middlesboro, and the Hyman Building in Pocahontas provide just a few examples. Some of the more successful businesspeople also built residential subdivisions in several towns; the Midleburg Addition of Logan, West Virginia, stands as one such district that still bears the name of its Jewish developer. Through the years, Jews worked to establish banks, utility services, parks, and other

community institutions. To advance their interest in civic and commercial development, they served on city councils and held a variety of municipal posts.

The arrival of Jews at the dawn of the coal boom helps explain their participation in the building of coalfield towns: from the start, these towns and their Jewish populations grew up together. But their persistence in the region also helps account for the scope of their activities. Arnold Midleburg built some of the first housing for workers in West Virginia's New River coalfield in the 1870s; the 1950s saw the dedication of Lewin Field in the New River hub of Beckley, with land donated by local businessman and Little League enthusiast Harry Lewin. The Weinsteins helped Middlesboro through its "bust" days of the 1890s; though members of the family had moved away by the 1930s, other Jewish families remained to play an important role in the town—albeit a role that, in a few cases, Sam and Herman Weinstein would have frowned upon. Their likely disapproval merely serves to show that Jewish involvement in coalfield town affairs took many different forms.[20]

The town-building activities of Jewish merchants did not always end in success. Leo Schaffer generated some excitement in the Fayette County, West Virginia, town of Sewell in 1901 with his plans to build a bridge across New River. His inability to complete the task probably contributed to Sewell being bypassed as a coalfield center. Schaffer went on to bigger and better things as mayor of Glen Jean, from which post he presided over the goings-on on the infamous south side of Thurmond (see chapter 2). Other grand plans of coalfield Jewish businessmen also ended up in failure—and often in bankruptcy court—because of their own personal misfortunes or shortcomings, or because of the vagaries of the coal economy. But Jews nevertheless had an impact on coalfield town development. The following sections explore this impact, starting with the smaller independent towns and concluding with the county seats. [21]

In the smallest towns where they settled, Jewish families made up a large portion of the tiny merchant class—sometimes they were the *entire* merchant class, at least at first. When Ukrainian immigrant Dave Scott (formerly Kotchman) arrived in Poor Fork, Kentucky, at the opening of the Harlan coalfield around 1910, "there was nothing there," according to his daughter. Scott opened a dry goods store and built the only brick structure in the area. (He started out with a tin building, but it proved too popular as a mark for drunken Saturday night target shooting by rowdy miners.) For awhile Scott operated the lone store in Poor Fork, but he soon saw the hamlet grow into a small town, aided by its proximity to the vast U.S. Steel coal mining complex at Lynch and the Wisconsin Steel mine complex at Benham. Concerned that the town's name hampered its prospects, he successfully lobbied to get "Poor Fork" changed to "Cumberland."[22]

Coincidentally, another Jewish David Scott (formerly Skot) benefited from the association of his little town of Wilcoe, West Virginia, with the enormous U.S. Steel complex at Gary. For several years this Scott too owned his town's only brick building, known as "The Store Upon the Hill." After his stint as a pioneering merchant of the tiny McDowell County coal town, Scott relocated to the county seat of Welch in 1915, leaving his brother-in-law to run the store. By far, Jews constituted the majority of those conducting trade in Wilcoe; at least sixteen Jewish merchants and clerks lived there with their families in the 1910s and 1920s.[23]

Jewish immigrants played a key role in the development of several small McDowell County towns. Russian-born Aaron Catzen came from Baltimore around 1900 and opened a clothing store in Clark. According to a memoir written by a relative, "At the time he came, the town was a whistle stop on the railway, and it was his hope that [it] would one day serve as a commercial center for the coal mine camps between Bluefield and Welch." He soon operated a shoe store, a

wholesale store, and a saloon. He then entered the real estate business and also organized the local power company, the waterworks, and an ice manufacturing company. "Through his vision and industry the town of Clark developed into a busy center for the surrounding area," the memoir relates. Clark became somewhat of a fiefdom for the hard-driving businessman. He owned much of the residential property and, instead of selling houses outright, offered long-term leases that enabled him to keep control of the land (not an unusual arrangement in the coalfields). Catzen was the only mayor Clark ever had, serving from the early 1920s to the late 1940s. He also was street commissioner, superintendent of the water plant, and "police judge." His brother-in-law Louis Schwartz served as recorder and treasurer during that time. Clark was incorporated in 1948 into the town of Northfork (situated just across the creek), where Jewish merchant Sam Rosen presided as mayor. Aside from their ethnicity and their mayoral posts, the two men appear to have had little in common: Rosen, popular owner of the local five-and-dime store, was motivated more by notions of public service than by visions of capitalist empire.[24]

In promoting progress for their little towns, leading Jewish citizens worked with local coal company representatives and sometimes shared a leadership role with them. In the 1890s Harry Bank opened the first store at a site along Elkhorn Creek that would soon become the town of Kimball. He remained Kimball's foremost merchant for the next thirty years, overseeing its development into an incorporated town. A 1917 newspaper article described a "great patriotic occasion" organized by Bank and the town's mayor, at which the superintendent of the King-Tidewater Coal Company presented the town with a large American flag on a twenty-five foot flagpole while Bank's store manager Ben Friedman handed out small flags to all passersby. Several other Jewish merchants also shaped Kimball's civic life, including Isadore Tobin, who served as sergeant and treasurer of the town in the early 1910s. In 1911 the Kimball City Council

granted Tobin the franchise for electricity, water, and a streetcar line. The license stipulated that he take over some of the equipment of the coal company, which had supplied electricity to part of the town; Tobin himself had already been supplying water to others.[25]

The civic leadership of Jews in some smaller coalfield towns is exemplified by a man who was born and raised in the region's very first boomtown. At age twenty-six Charles Midleburg served as justice of the peace in the district centered around the New River town of Sewell. His father Arnold had been the leading merchant of the town's early years and Charles and his brother had taken over the family businesses upon reaching adulthood. The homegrown younger Midleburgs blended easily into the local elite. As justice, Charles soon demonstrated his devotion to a new order based on civic authority rather than parameters set by family and communal norms. According to a 1905 *Fayette Journal* article,

> Squire Midelburg [sic], at Sewell, tried his first important case this week. Miss Fink . . . found it necessary to whip a Meadows boy for eating peanuts in school. He was given a sound thrashing and his father had the schoolmistress arrested. The trial before Squire Midelburg lasted four hours and resulted in acquital [sic] for the schoolmarm, whom the Squire commended for her thorough work.

Later that year the newspaper recounted "Squire Midelburg's Busy and Exciting Sunday: Foreign Miners Go on War Path." The squire showed up at a coal camp to help the local constable quell a disturbance that resulted when some miners "became too boisterous over their Sunday beer." The constable had been shot in the leg; Midleburg arrested four men and marched them off to jail. The article concluded, "A Kaymoor man who noted the procession, remarked that he would like to see any such blankety blank squire arrest him. Midleburg immediately took him in tow and had him handcuffed to one of the foreigners in a jiffy. On the way up the mountain the Kaymoor man begged and apologized so profusely that he was released."[26]

Nowhere in the region did Jews become more involved in municipal development and civic affairs than in Keystone, the hard-scrabble town that hosted the coalfields' largest percentage of Jewish residents in its formative years. Today, Hermanson Street is one of the few remaining signs of that involvement. S. L. Hermanson served as town recorder and a town policemen in the 1910s; he also developed residential real estate. Another vestige of Keystone's Jewish legacy is its City Hall, which bears a cornerstone engraving listing I. L. Shor and Sol Hyman as two members of the city council committee that oversaw the building's construction in 1913. At that time Keystone's five-man City Council contained two African Americans in addition to the two Jewish merchants—a rather remarkable configuration for any small American town of the era, and particularly illustrative of Keystone's open social climate. At least six Jews sat on the city council through the years. As late as the 1960s, when the declining town had only two Jewish families, Keystone-born Julian Budnick served as mayor. His father, merchant and behind-the-scenes power broker Charles Budnick, had been instrumental in starting the First National Bank of Keystone during the boom years decades earlier. I. L. Shor built much of the town's commercial and residential real estate. Master mechanic Max Ofsa built the town water tank around 1910. (The previous tank had burst, causing a flood to inundate the home of merchant Jake Shore and setting off a lengthy legal action against the city by the litigious Shore.) In the 1920s, butcher Simon Ofsa (son of Max) served a term as fire marshal.[27]

Simon Ofsa's post was an important one; many coalfield towns, but especially hastily-built boomtowns such as Keystone, Pocahontas, and Middlesboro, suffered the common boomtown curse of frequent fires. Jewish men from the lowliest clerks to the most substantial merchants participated in volunteer fire departments that stayed busy year round. Primitive fire fighting

conditions, along with the efforts of Jewish businessmen in fighting coalfield fires, are revealed in an eyewitness account of a 1921 Pocahontas fire written by a former schoolteacher:

> Pocahontas had very poor fire protection then, but a most interesting means of alerting the people in case of a fire. After I had been there only a short time, I was awakened one night by a rapid succession of shots. Alarmed, I ran to ask . . . what it all meant, and was told that there was a fire in town. We put on our coats over our night clothes and ran into the streets in time to see Mr. Sid Block [son of Michael Bloch] pulling a two wheel cart with some hose on it.

The *McDowell Times* filled its pages with excited accounts of each Keystone fire while complaining bitterly of low water pressure and faulty equipment, not to mention the flimsy construction of many buildings. In a 1916 article emblazoned "FIRE! Destroys Three Buildings, Threatens Half of Keystone," the newspaper reported that "It was only because of the daring fire fighting of the volunteer fire company led on the Cinder Bottom side by I. L. Shor and Jake Ofsa [another son of Max] that the fire was confined to the three buildings mentioned."[28]

The reputation—and no doubt the behavior—of at least some Jewish businessmen in Keystone fluctuated according to the economic fortunes of the town. When the *McDowell Times*, in full booster mode, consulted "leading business men in the city" for its article "Banner Business Year in Keystone" during the 1913 Christmas season, six out of twelve interviewed were Jewish merchants who sagaciously assessed business conditions. But when the local economy went into decline after passage of West Virginia's prohibition law, those same people came in for their share of the blame. Wrote the editor in 1916, "The Jews, who are called 'God's chosen people,' are wanted to put away that usual jealousy that is so characteristic of them in this city, and just start out on a boosting tour. Any man who prefers to knock, knock, knock rather than to boost, boost, boost the town ought to be politely [sic] enough to leave the city." The previous week, the town council had pointedly ordered businessmen Harry Budnick (Jewish) and

A. L. Calhoun (black) to repair their sidewalks. When better times came along with the wartime demand for coal, a typical *Times* item praised the "generosity and public-spiritedness" of Wolf Bank for building a walkway across Elkhorn Creek near his café. "Mr. Bank is the owner of much valuable property in this city and is one of the best and most patriotic citizens," the article observed, as it urged city officials to reimburse Bank for the public improvement.[29]

Jews did not play as large a part in the development of county seat towns as they did in the other independent towns where they settled. They never made up a numerically significant portion of the overall population in the county seats, nor did they ever constitute a clear majority of the merchants. Moreover, county seat towns were not quite as raw as the other towns. Some had existed long before the coal boom and already had a fairly entrenched town elite; all, by virtue of their dual role as seat of government and commercial hub, saw the rise of a more broad-based, if small, middle class—including a professional cohort absent from most other coalfield towns. County seats therefore developed a more traditional small-town social structure led by prosperous, native-born white men.[30]

Nevertheless, local elites welcomed the contributions of entrepreneurial newcomers. Jews formed a notable segment of the county seat middle class, though none achieved the status that Aaron Catzen, Harry Bank, and Charles Budnick did in Clark, Kimball, and Keystone. Their presence at the beginning of the coal boom, when the need for fellow boosters was great, facilitated their acceptance. And many families stayed long enough to participate in county seat development for several decades. Joe Herzbrun's sons Edward and Maurice followed in his civic footsteps, serving on the Welch City Council and McDowell County Commission. A history of Bell County, Kentucky, credits the Eusters with "constructing the fourth brick building" in

Pineville around 1890. In the 1960s, one of the county's many Abe Eusters (following Jewish custom, at least four of the original six Euster brothers named a son after their deceased father Abraham) served as Pineville's mayor. Alex Gergely started out peddling groceries on horseback in Harlan County, and then sold miners' work clothes as owner of an early Harlan department store. His son Irvin served on the Harlan City Council and as president of the Lions Club, the Harlan Country Club, and the local Red Cross chapter.[31]

In the early years, town elites encouraged young Jewish merchants by offering financial assistance. Hungarian immigrant Rudy Eiland opened a small general store along the C&O tracks across the Guyan River from Logan's town center in 1914, when the tracks were still "the only avenue for the people to walk into and out of the town." After he was wiped out by a flood in 1918, credit from a local bank allowed him to reopen his store in Logan proper. When James Pickus went bankrupt during the Depression, the president of a Beckley bank purchased the assets of his store and gave it all back to him, saying, "pay me when you can." Several leading businessmen from Keystone and Welch gave "all-around hustler" Sam Polon his start in real estate in the early 1910s. Their investment yielded results; a local history of McDowell County later referred to the developer as "the man who, so to speak, put Welch 'on the map'." Polon also served as president of the chamber of commerce, a director of the McDowell County National Bank, and organizer of charity fundraising drives.[32]

Harry Schwachter's brash manner convinced Williamson notable Wells Goodykoontz to finance his first home even though the young man, who had just become part-owner of his father-in-law's struggling department store, did not even have the money for a down payment. If he received the loan, Schwachter brazenly assured the banker, "'I will be glad to see that your bank handles the bulk of my future real estate transactions'." Goodykoontz's gamble paid off as

Schwachter became one of Williamson's most successful businessmen, with a flourishing clothing store and extensive real estate interests. He became a pillar of the community: an organizer of the chamber of commerce, assistant captain of the volunteer fire department (suffering severe injuries in one blaze), member of numerous civic clubs, promoter of municipal projects, and a principal speaker at town banquets. In a memoir, his daughter observes that Schwachter, an inveterate "organizer and joiner," was "pleased to know that along with his progress on these lines, his business continued to expand as well." Yet his pride in his community was genuine. In a 1923 banquet speech, he reviewed the progress of the town:

> Fourteen years ago, when I first came to Williamson, it was the usual, small, busy, hustling mining town, with its rather flexible laws and two or three prosperous saloons. . . . By 1912, things began to boom when thousands found employment with the development of the Pond Creek Coal Company, and you could see new wealth pouring into every kind of business. There was a building boom, a number of handsome buildings were erected, and the town passed over its primitive stages into the city it is today.[33]

Despite the civic exploits of businessmen such as Schwachter and Polon, there were limits to how far Jews could go in county seat leadership roles. They held few significant political offices; Pineville's Abe Euster was the only Jewish county seat mayor. In Logan, two Jewish merchants served on the city council but "that's about as far as they went in local government," according to one Jewish native. As they moved from the smaller towns into the county seats, Jews tended to forego politics and instead pursued their civic goals through organizations such as the chamber of commerce. They may have decided not to venture too far beyond their economic niche, instinctively realizing that the surrounding society would not accept them in other roles. Some clearly sensed an intangible barrier. One man told researcher Jerome David that "there is a quota on the number of Jews allowed to serve on the Board of Directors of the banks in

Williamson—one per bank." Even the ebullient Schwachter felt that his Jewishness constituted a subtle obstacle to total acceptance. But other factors may have combined to restrain Jewish participation in politics and certain facets of civic life, such as their lack of direct connection to the coal industry and their relative newness compared to the more established town elite. It could also simply be that they found other ways to advance their interests, or were too busy working in their stores to engage in time-consuming extra activities.[34]

Not surprisingly given their economic niche, Jews did participate heavily in local chambers of commerce. These organizations offered a vehicle to directly boost downtown business districts as well as address various civic issues. A newspaper article described one "splendid" 1922 chamber meeting in Welch organized by three local businessmen, including twenty-seven-year-old Edward Herzbrun. First, Rev. L. W. Pierce reported on the efforts of the playground committee to secure land. The group then discussed providing a rest room for women shoppers and establishing a town cemetery. Pool room operator Simon Solins (a leading Jewish citizen) "called attention to the number of school children who had to cross the railroad tracks daily in order to get to and from school and urged the chamber take some action" to protect children from train and auto traffic; a committee was duly appointed. After this "snappy business session," the gathering was treated to a showing of *The Story of Coal*, "the moving picture produced jointly by the National Coal Association and the Department of Interior."[35]

The event served a social function as well: a "delightful" dinner was provided by the Congregation Emanuel Sisterhood, the town's Jewish women's group. The article devoted almost as much space to describing the dinner as it did to the meeting itself, concluding that "the ladies had spared no pains to make this an event long to be remembered." (On the menu: chicken fricassee, string beans, mashed potatoes, celery, liver salad, pickles, hot rolls, and French

pudding with wine sauce.) The entire depiction leaves the impression of an organization that was both comfortably ecumenical and comfortably middle class, with Jews holding a secure place in the social order.[36]

On a chilly day in February, 1917, eighteen "young ladies" of Middlesboro treated their friends and relations to a piano recital at the Christian Church. Among them were Pearl Euster, Lillie Weinstein, Irene Weinstein, Rose Mazer, and Rose Liebman, who ranged in age from nine to fifteen years old. This prototypical small town event is not particularly remarkable, but it does provide a few clues about life in Middlesboro that are not found in most accounts of the notorious coalfield center. It reveals the ambition of the town's middle-to-upper classes to bring a certain amount of "high culture" to the raw atmosphere of the region, it hints that females were disproportionately involved in such attempts, and it suggests that the town's Jewish population was well-integrated into that segment of society concerned with such matters (notwithstanding the venue of that particular event).[37]

Through the years, coalfield newspapers filled many columns with descriptions of social affairs such as the piano recital. These goings-on offer one indication that, as Harry Schwachter proclaimed in his 1923 speech, county seat towns and the larger coalfield centers developed beyond their rough-and-ready beginnings to become modern urban centers with social as well as physical infrastructures that in many ways conformed to common small-town American patterns. Yet the more unruly characteristics associated with a boomtown environment never entirely disappeared, especially in towns whose initial contribution to the coal economy consisted of supplying liquor and other forms of distraction to the region's workforce. Middlesboro in particular maintained a somewhat schizophrenic personality, with its broad streets, stately

homes, substantial business district, plethora of churches and civic clubs—and continued reputation for corruption and wildness. It was the kind of place that a local history, depicting the 1930s, could refer to as a "gang controlled city" and (on the very next page) a "nice shopping center" serving the broader Cumberland Gap area.[38]

If coalfield towns had some ground to cover from rawness to refinement—and made the transition to varying degrees—the same can be said of their Jewish populations. While Jews from Squire Midleburg to the piano playing young ladies of Middlesboro may have exemplified bourgeois aspects of the new order, Jewish immigrants and at least some of their descendants partook as well in the less orderly side of life in the region. The next two sections will describe these two different facets of Jewish engagement in the coalfield social scene. Each of their dual incarnations—as participants in boomtown activities and upholders of middle class ways—grew out of their economic niche and were conditioned as well by the cultural background they brought to their new setting.

Jews in the Coalfield Social Scene, Part I: At Home in the Boomtowns

While kin-based networks and a long history in trade launched coalfield Jews into commercial pursuits, it was the local environment that shaped what kind of commerce they would pursue. The region's first major centers of Jewish population were the wide open towns of Keystone, Pocahontas, and Middlesboro—and Jewish immigrants were fully prepared to embrace all the opportunities these boomtowns afforded. The conspicuous demand for liquor guaranteed that many leading Jewish citizens would get their start as bartenders or saloon keepers in the era before prohibition came to the region in 1914. This occupation placed them squarely in the center of boomtown affairs. On the whole, Jews appear to have had little trouble

adapting to the prevailing conditions of life in these less-than-respectable towns.[39]

With their participation in the liquor trade, Jews in coalfield boomtowns were engaging in a familiar occupation that extended for centuries into the East European countryside. In the old country, the limited opportunities available to Jews combined with their traditional role as "middlemen" between producers and consumers to make tavern-keeping and alcohol distribution an important path to economic survival and advancement. The Jewish-owned tavern became "a part of everyday life in the Polish towns and countryside" with relations between Jewish tavern owners and their mostly-peasant clients ranging from "fraternal to businesslike to violent." As economic and social conditions in Eastern Europe deteriorated starting in the late seventeenth century, the Jewish innkeeper became a reviled figure in the Russian and Polish press, blamed for the "intoxication and impoverishment" of the peasants. Such scapegoating made Jewish tavern owners especially vulnerable to outbreaks of hostility during times of frustration on the part of the local populace.[40]

In the Central Appalachian coalfields, Jews made up a relatively small percentage of saloon keepers and there is no indication that they came under special disapprobation for their role in the trade.[41] Violence did pose a problem—but it had nothing to do with anti-semitism. Rapid industrialization contained all the ingredients for mayhem, chief among them the disproportionate number of young, single men drawn to the region from all over the world. Under considerable stress because of their perilous occupation, explains one historian, young men "who had been uprooted from definite expectations of social behavior and placed in a strange and unfamiliar environment" not surprisingly "sought relief in exaggerated and sporadic outbursts of unbridled behavior." Heavy liquor consumption increased the potential for disorder, and ethnic and racial tensions added to the combustible mix.[42]

If not nearly as dangerous as mining, saloon work offered its own occupational hazards. In 1901 Jewish saloon owner William Henry of Keystone was shot in the leg while trying to eject an unruly coal miner from his establishment. The miner had become agitated when Henry's bartender refused to sell him another drink. After the bartender struck the man with a beer bottle and tried to remove him, the man pulled out a pistol and began shooting wildly. The Bluefield, West Virginia, newspaper characterized the incident as an example of Keystone's "usual payday pleasantries." Fellow Keystone saloon owner Israel Totz kept a gun behind his bar for just such emergencies. Many other Jewish business owners in the boomtowns owned firearms that they occasionally put to use; in 1903, Harry Goodfriend shot at robbers who tried to break into his brother Jake's Middlesboro department store late one night.[43]

An incident in Pocahontas suggests that even though their involvement in the saloon business did not call forth adverse consequences for Jews as an ethnic group, they were nevertheless sensitive about their image. A (non-Jewish) woman who grew up in the town recalls that a Chautauqua group came one year to perform at the Pocahontas opera house. The producers sought a local child to appear in their play, and settled on a "pretty little blonde girl" who happened to be Jewish. When members of the Jewish community found out that the production was "Ten Nights in a Bar Room," that its theme was temperance, and that the girl in the play had to go into a bar to look for her father, they at first suspected they were being subjected to an ethnic slur. But after getting together to discuss it amongst themselves, they decided that no harm was intended and that it was all right for the little girl to appear in the play. Everyone in town attended, "and they were proud of her." [44]

In addition to concern for their image, the Pocahontas Jewish community probably did not take well to the theme of the play. For religious as well as economic reasons, Jews throughout

America looked askance at the temperance and prohibition movements that swept the nation in the early twentieth century. Historian Hannah Sprecher notes that "Judaism frowned upon the notion of total self-denial: God's gifts to man were meant to be enjoyed—in moderation—and among those gifts was wine." Rabbinical tradition even considers abstinence from the pleasures of life to be sinful, though over-indulgence is strongly discouraged. Moreover, wine has always been an integral part of Jewish ritual and celebration.[45]

The negative attitude of Jews toward prohibition was shared by the majority of coalfield town residents. The region's other immigrant groups also had alcohol-related customs. For decades, the major social event of the year in Pocahontas was the Hungarian Grape Festival, while Italians in Harlan County maintained a tradition of wine making. Nor did blacks show much enthusiasm for banning liquor; the *McDowell Times* often mocked the idea. Meanwhile "native whites" had well-known practices of their own regarding liquor production and consumption. Much of the populace therefore did its best to ignore prohibition laws and liquor remained widespread even though the region's more reputable saloon owners moved into other lines of business after the sale of alcohol became illegal. Like others, Jews continued to be consumers. One man who grew up in Welch during prohibition recalled that the wine for his bar mitzvah was supplied by the county sheriff.[46]

Temperance campaigns within the region were not unknown, however, with local Baptists leading the charge. In Fayette County, anti-saloon crusaders attempted to get the county court to deny all saloon licenses in 1906. According to the *Fayette Journal*, the court session drew a large crowd, with "almost as many temperance people as saloon men." Women temperance supporters "took an active part in the discussion" and a petition signed by "three thousand voters and two thousand women" was presented. "Wet" advocates, however, pointed out that their candidates

had overwhelmingly won the previous election. The court reached a compromise, denying licenses only to the most objectionable saloons (one-quarter of the total). Pocahontas witnessed a large anti-saloon rally in 1909. A picture of the event shows well over one hundred demonstrators, mostly women and children, dressed in black and carrying signs ("Saloons Cannot Run Without Boys, Have You One To Spare, Think It Over").[47]

However, it is likely that most of the participants came not from Pocahontas itself but from surrounding rural areas. Across the border in Kentucky, Bell County went through numerous liquor battles through the decades, with residents of Middlesboro consistently defending the "wet" position against their more upright rural neighbors. When the county voted "dry" in 1914, Middlesboro voters went 639-461 against the majority. In 1937 voters brought back liquor by a wide margin, with the greatest amount of "wet" support coming from Middlesboro. But the "drys" did not give up, and the county continued to swing back and forth between allowing and prohibiting alcohol. In Keystone's McDowell County, however, prohibition seems to have garnered little or no support through the years. The political dominance of "wet" coal operators probably was decisive, though the county's large and politically active population of Jews and blacks also may have impeded the movement.[48]

Only scattered evidence exists of Jews becoming directly involved in prohibition politics. Max Matz was born and raised in Pocahontas, where his family had owned a saloon. As a Bluefield hotel owner and active Republican, he served as president of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment in the early 1930s. In 1955, after Bell County once again went dry, Ike Ginsburg's son Jimmy "[hung] a mourning wreath on his Indian Rock roadhouse near Dead Man's Curve" near Middlesboro. Sixty-two businesses closed, but then reopened two days later after a court challenge. As supporters and opponents of prohibition gathered outside City Hall

one day, tempers flared, and "a fist fight [was] narrowly averted. . . . The argument [was] between a group of local liquor dealers led by Jimmy Ginsburg and Rev. Wendell Rone" of the First Baptist Church.[49]

Aside from saloons, the boomtowns featured other businesses that catered especially to single men. Illegal gambling parlors abounded. More famously, the demographics offered a flourishing market for prostitution, with Keystone's Cinder Bottom (named for the cinders from nearby coke ovens which covered the ground) the most notorious center of the trade. The citizens of Keystone—including its sizable Jewish cohort—tolerated the goings-on in their vice district; their version of social reform mainly consisted of trying to ensure that the licentious activities at Cinder Bottom did not spill over to the rest of the town. A 1914 *McDowell Times* article praised city officials for their attempts to "clean up" Keystone by requiring "women of the underworld to keep off the streets at night . . . [and] to live in Cinder Bottom or leave the city." These measures, the writer commented, along with additional directives to merchants to "keep chicken coops, boxes, barrels and rubbish off the streets," were giving Keystone "the appearance of a Sunday school . . . and a Puritan of the seventeenth century could not hope to make things better."[50]

The following year, the *McDowell Times* editor protested the possible denial of restaurant licenses to Cinder Bottom establishments. His words reveal the lax attitude of local leadership: "It has been the understanding here that the County and City authorities segregated that district in order to minimize the evil influence of the class of people who are supposed to contaminate society, that they should be kept off the principal streets of the City and not molest respectable people," he noted. Since this plan seemed to be working, he argued, it would be hypocritical to move against the district. The *Times* was quick to condemn improprieties that occurred outside

the boundaries of Cinder Bottom. In 1917 the editor questioned why denizens of the district "should have such unlimited latitude" and demanded, "Make them scarce. Take them off the streets." Yet the newspaper's moral fervor was equally aroused by other unseemly conditions that made the town look bad: that same year an even more outraged article complained of hogs running loose, spreading "dirt and filth . . . all over the town."[51]

Town leaders evidently achieved some success in confining gambling and prostitution to Cinder Bottom. One Jewish man who grew up in Keystone delivered newspapers to the vice district as a boy around 1920. He insisted that "it was like a little town of its own," isolated from the rest of Keystone. Yet Cinder Bottom's reputation, if not its activities, certainly did spill over to the rest of town. In 1912 the anonymous "Virginia lad" contributed to this process with his anti-Keystone booklet, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day: Or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia*. He put a dark interpretation on the town's seeming normality: "To an ordinary visitor . . . it does not appear to be very much different from the ordinary coal mining town. The people are very kind to strangers and visitors are liable to be misled by surface indications. But let us probe beneath the surface a little and what we will find will be rather shocking." From its vaunted position in the county seat of Welch, the *McDowell Recorder* viewed Keystone with a mixture of disapproval and indulgence. In 1917 the newspaper saw fit to comment that "there are lots and lots of good people in Keystone, but a lot of them seem indifferent to the town's reputation." As the town went through its ups and downs, so did the newspaper's opinion. In 1922 the *Recorder* observed, "There are many little petty vices holding tenaciously to the one-time unsavory reputation of the city, but . . . . In the last few years many handsome business and residential structures have been erected in Keystone and the town is really moving along in the right direction." [52]

In fact, despite the geographic isolation of Cinder Bottom, Keystone's respectable and less-respectable sides existed in a symbiosis that often made it hard to differentiate the two. During its heyday from the 1890s through the 1910s, leading citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, black and white, engaged in the activities that made the town infamous. Between 1905 and 1909 at least two eminent Jewish merchants and real estate owners were hauled into court for renting buildings to women who ran "houses of ill fame." The court cited one man on at least two separate occasions. The other, one of the town's wealthiest citizens, rented to a woman named Trixie McCloud, who ran "the cleanest and best-conducted house" in town—an ironic compliment, coming from the "Virginia lad." The two landlords were fined twenty-five dollars for each offense.[53]

It was common knowledge that local brothels did not cater only to coal miners: McCloud's establishment was "well patronized" by "merchants, clerks, railroad men and a few foreigners." In 1915 a scandalous trial of two well-connected African American madams, accused of forcing an underage black girl into prostitution, threatened to expose Jewish and non-Jewish white businessmen as clients. As the *McDowell Times* noted of one of the pair, "It appears that her patrons were some of the leading white and Hebrew business men and officials of the section and her hold could not be easily broken." However, the only white patrons compelled to testify were a non-Jewish coal company bookkeeper and a Jewish pool room employee (and former bartender), who refused to answer questions on grounds of self-incrimination. Ultimately, only African Americans were convicted, including the madams and a black patron. The former bartender was indicted but no record could be found indicating that he ever stood trial. He remained in town and later became a prominent pharmacist, which perhaps says something about the forgiving climate of Keystone and its Jewish community.[54]

Keystone was not the only coalfield town where Jewish merchants strayed from the letter of the law. Apparently, court fines were considered part of the cost of doing business during the early years of the coal boom (though not in the county seats). Starting with Arnold Midleburg himself, Jewish saloon owners, as well as their non-Jewish counterparts, routinely appeared in court to plead guilty to selling liquor to minors or selling liquor on a Sunday. Midleburg was actually fined at least fifteen times in the 1880s for selling liquor without a license (why the well-known Sewell merchant did not acquire one in all those years is unknown). In 1890, finally possessed of a license, he was promptly fined for selling to a minor.[55]

Others who became prominent citizens often found themselves in court during their younger days. Louis Kaufman, later a wealthy Bluefield businessman, was fined for operating a poolroom without a license in Kimball in 1897 and frequently anted up for Sunday liquor selling before the turn of the century. Wolf Bank, mainstay of the Keystone Jewish community, was even sentenced to a brief jail stay in 1897 for not paying a liquor-related fine. Occasionally Jewish merchants were hauled in for other, similar offenses; Sam Abel of the Fayette County town of Mount Hope paid a ten dollar fine after pleading guilty to operating a gambling house in 1915. In one rather dramatic 1905 episode, the Middlesboro Distilling Company, owned by Jewish merchant Jake Goodfriend in partnership with two non-Jews, became the target of "one of the largest raids known to Kentucky." Revenue officers seized fourteen thousand gallons of whiskey. "It had long been suspected by officials that the local company was disposing of whiskey without paying taxes," according to a newspaper report. [56]

Other clues buried in court records add to the evidence that Jews in the early boomtown era fit into their surroundings perfectly well. Perhaps their origins in the gritty shtetls and small cities

of Eastern and Central Europe helped to prepare them for the conditions they would encounter. Many arrived as rough, hardened immigrants determined to advance themselves. Arrests on charges such as assault and battery, though not frequent, occurred enough to suggest that they occasionally indulged in the same kind of unruly behavior as their fellow coalfield residents. Arnold Midleburg even apparently engaged in a feud, with one William D. Stroud: in April 1873 Midleburg pleaded guilty to assault and battery against Stroud and the following March he was convicted of destroying "a large quantity of medicine and a pair of saddle bags and a bottle of liquor" belonging to the same man. For each misdemeanor he was fined one dollar plus costs, hinting that his actions were not seen as unusual or even all that objectionable.[57]

Nor did Jewish immigrants in the boomtowns seem especially concerned, in their day-to-day lives, about how their neighbors viewed them—notwithstanding occasional sore spots such as the Pocahontas temperance play. Their activities bear out the contention of a Jewish traveler in nineteenth century South Africa that "'It is seldom the most polished part of the population . . . that seek their fortunes'" by settling in newly opened territories. Coalfield Jews tangled with non-Jews in the civil courts on a fairly regular basis, mostly over business matters such as property disputes and debt payments. Even more contentious amongst themselves, they showed no qualms about bringing their internal conflicts to the local courts—as when Sam Katzen of Keystone sued Jake Shore for slander for spreading the rumor that he was having an affair with Bessie Zaltzman, a married woman. After accusing Shore of "falsely and maliciously" stating he had "taken Mr. Saltzman's wife away from him and [was] living with her," Katzen eventually dropped the suit and paid all court costs, suggesting that the rumor had some truth behind it. Bessie Zaltzman subsequently divorced her less-than-upright husband, Mose. A most determined woman, she then carried on lengthy and heated court battles against her enemies within the

Keystone Jewish community, in defense of her various real estate interests.[58]

Depositions from one such lawsuit, recorded in 1909, offer a glimpse into the world of early Jewish coalfield residents. The language they used—rough, broken English inflected with both Yiddish and Appalachian constructions—indicates that these were not the most educated of immigrants. (Bessie Zaltzman signed her deposition with a mark, instead of writing her name.) They scrapped and clawed to provide for themselves and their families, sparring with each other and their non-Jewish neighbors if they had to. Pressured by African American businessman A. L. Calhoun to sell her property after her house was destroyed by fire, Bessie refused, later explaining, "I didn't want to sell for no money because I make a living here and I got my customers that I sell my milk and butter and I done got used [to living] here and I will put me up again a little home and live with my children." Meanwhile, her soon-to-be-ex-husband Mose succumbed to the temptations of the area, according to the loquacious Jake Shore, who claimed that his former employee stole from him: "He took my money without my knowing and give it to the womens. I find it out afterwards that he used to pay that womens fifty to seventy-five dollars a night." Since Mose had no money of his own, Jake decided to recoup his losses by putting a lien on Bessie's property, causing a deep enmity between the two (no doubt exacerbated by Jake's gossiping). As she declared, "I would go a mile around not to see his face."[59]

A glance through coalfield criminal court indexes in West Virginia turns up Jewish names with startling frequency during the early decades of the century—and not just saloon owners. A closer analysis, however, reveals the vast majority of cases were for a single infraction: violation of the state's Sunday law, which forbade working "at any trade or calling" on Sunday, the Christian Sabbath. This statute, dating to 1882, nabbed everyone from the most solid businessmen to struggling peddlers. In 1909 alone, the highly respected dry goods merchants

Ben Hurvitz and Joseph Lopinsky were summoned at least four different months for violating the Sunday law in Fayette County. Each time, they pleaded guilty and paid a five dollar fine plus some twenty dollars in court costs. In 1899, one H. or B. Shore, a shopkeeper in Mount Hope, pleaded not guilty to a Sunday law violation. Although the court record is rather sketchy, it appears that Shore either doubted the existence of such a law or simply refused to go along with it. In a trial presided over by the town's mayor, Shore, acting in his own defense, proceeded to call the mayor as a material witness (one might speculate that the mayor had been a customer of Shore's on the Sunday in question). His ploy worked: though found guilty by the local court, he won his case on appeal. More often than not, however, merchants dutifully paid their Sunday law fines, which started at five dollars but grew to twenty-five dollars in some locales.[60]

It is unknown whether Jewish merchants felt particularly victimized by the Sunday law, or whether they simply accepted it as part of life in their new homes. Thirty-seven states had similar laws, including Virginia and Kentucky. The West Virginia statute, as in some other states, did stipulate that people whose religious convictions led them to observe the Sabbath on a different day were exempt from the law "provided that such persons refrain from secular business and labor" on their own Sabbath—but Jewish merchants did not have that option, since Saturdays were the busiest shopping days in the coalfields.[61]

Jewish names show up much less frequently in court records after around 1918. Although Sunday closing laws remained on the books for decades, enforcement became lax in the post-World War I era. By that time very few Jews continued to be associated with the liquor trade, thus removing the other major cause of their involvement in the criminal court system. Jewish coalfield communities were maturing and passing out of their "frontier" phase. In this they

mirrored the larger society around them: by World War I, the effect of prohibition, the return of many single male immigrants to their home countries, and the maturing of coalfield towns and their populations combined to bring about a new, more settled phase of town life. Not coincidentally, around that same time the county seats secured their position as the leading centers of commercial activity and the largest independent towns in the region (see Table 1). Early Jewish inhabitants of the county seats, for the most part, had not participated in the activities pursued by their boomtown counterparts; few had owned saloons and their appearance in court records had been always been rare. As the bulk of the Jewish population shifted to these towns, Jews settled into their role as an upstanding component of the town-based middle class.[62]

This chronological and geographic progression has its exceptions, however, and remnants of their rougher edges lingered in various forms. For decades, a few Jewish businessmen in Keystone and Middlesboro continued to have less-than-kosher financial interests. And colorful characters did not disappear entirely from the scene. For example, Joe "Jokie" Ofsa, born in Keystone in 1901, became a high school teacher and coach in Kimball and War (a respectable, if not very Jewish, coalfield occupation) but also distinguished himself as "quite a pool shark" who, legend has it, defeated Minnesota Fats in a match in Keystone. Probably the most conspicuous character was Chicago gangster and erstwhile Middlesboro resident Jake Zuta, who visited town throughout the 1920s in his big black car, bringing lavish gifts to his Ginsburg relatives. (He usually came to spend the Jewish high holidays with his Kentucky family.) Townspeople professed astonishment upon learning of Zuta's involvement with the underworld; until his 1930 murder he had been viewed as a local boy made good in the big city. But they quickly recovered from the shock. As the *Middlesboro Daily News* commented, "in Chicago, a strange, masked career is hidden from the eyes of former friends, near relatives who loved, and

old acquaintances. . . . Memory of the beautiful traits of character of Zuta relieves the pain and softens the sorrow." All the Jewish stores in town closed, in memoriam, on the day of his funeral. His obituary noted that he had been a member of the Middlesboro Country Club and the Elks while an accompanying article reported with tabloid-like relish the details of his last desperate days.[63]

In contrast, the career of Isadore Katzen offers a striking illustration of the geographic and socioeconomic journey of coalfield Jews from rough boomtown immigrants to staid county seat citizens. Katzen came from Hungary with his parents, arriving in Keystone around 1897 at age twelve. His first job, with the A. Goodman Liquor Company of Pocahontas, did not hinder his being named prohibition officer for McDowell County in 1915. The *McDowell Recorder* praised the appointment, noting that he was "well acquainted all over the county." The newspaper avidly followed the actions of Katzen and his fellow officer Ben Gay (former saloonkeeper from an old local family), often depicting the pair as "swooping down" on unsuspecting bootleggers (usually "foreigners" or "negroes"). Given their backgrounds, it is unlikely that Katzen or Gay had strong convictions against liquor. But as up-and-coming young men, they enforced the law with gusto. "There is no chance for any person to sell liquor for a very long period in McDowell County and not get caught," an article proclaimed of the duo.[64]

Yet law enforcement had its drawbacks. Isadore Katzen's career as a prohibition officer culminated in a 1916 acquittal for the homicide of a suspected (native white) bootlegger in Deegans, a small coal camp. The jury found that Katzen had acted in self-defense. The *Recorder* ran a detailed account of the "unfortunate" incident, noting, "Mr. Katzen has been a very careful officer in the past. . . . His friends know him to be kind and do not think but that he acted as he deemed right." After the trial the paper observed, "Mr. Katzen was busy shaking hands with

many friends and receiving their congratulations. The verdict seemed to meet with popular approval. Unquestionably Mr. Katzen was the happiest man that ever trod the streets of Welch." He later turned to a less adventurous occupation, owner of a Welch wholesale grocery concern, which he eventually passed on to his son. Along the way, this relative of alleged adulterer Sam Katzen (his father's brother or cousin) married Anna Herzbrun, daughter of the highly-respected merchant tailor Josef Herzbrun. A founding member of Welch's Congregation Emanuel, Isadore became active in many civic and fraternal groups, including the Masons and Elks. [65]

Jews in the Coalfield Social Scene, Part II: Middle Class Mainstays

Isadore Katzen's move from Keystone to the county seat of Welch, from liquor company employee to law enforcement officer to business owner and civic-communal leader, is symbolic of the increased respectability of Jews as they moved away from their immigrant origins, integrated into their social surroundings, and prospered. As they solidified their position in the coalfield middle class, their participation in the social scene would continue to be shaped by their own individual and communal development, within the context of the changing realities of the coalfield environment and an economic niche that responded to those changes.

Yet in the memories of Jews who came of age in the region between the two world wars, it was the neighborliness of small-town life, rather than more complex socioeconomic factors, that determined their relations with the non-Jewish majority. "The Jewish community was close . . . but we were very friendly with everyone else in town," recalled a man who grew up in Northfork. "Everyone knew everyone else." His words were echoed by many others in interviews and memoirs: "We knew just about everyone. I loved Williamson and all my wonderful friends." In Pineville, "all the Jewish people made many Christian friends." Keystone

was "a very close community. Everyone was quite friendly." Distinct social circles did exist, revolving around church or synagogue affiliation. Organized social activities usually took place among people who belonged to the same congregation, whether Jewish, Methodist, or Baptist. Also, individual coalfield ethnic groups tended to coalesce around their own language and customs. Nevertheless, from the beginning, members of coalfield Jewish communities, both children and adults, drew their day-to-day friendships from a wider pool of neighbors, classmates, voluntary associations, and business contacts. [66]

Non-Jews too recollect a small town sociability that carried over into relations with their Jewish neighbors. One woman who married a local Jewish man in the 1930s stated matter-of-factly, "I'm an Irish girl that married a Jewish boy." She insisted that "We all got along real well. . . . In a little town like Keystone, the Jewish people and the other people loved each other. We didn't think about [religion making people] any different—which we weren't." While this statement may be somewhat of an exaggeration, the multicultural nature of many coalfield towns did serve to make ethnic and religious variety a familiar and accepted fact of life: unremarkable, even normal. Although ethnic and racial tensions and prejudices existed, townspeople did not let their different backgrounds stand in the way of forging close-knit communities. After reeling off all the ethnic and religious groups she could remember from her childhood in Pocahontas (southern whites and blacks, Welsh, Jews, Hungarians, Russians, Poles, "a church of every denomination except Lutheran, and a Jewish synagogue"), a native Virginian who married a Hungarian coal miner stressed that all these various groups got along "grand." A non-Jewish woman who grew up in War agreed that nobody "paid any mind" to ethnic or religious differences. Of the town's Jewish families, she remarked, "I feel I know them as well as my own family." (Her comments only partially extended to racial differences; see chapter 6 for a fuller

treatment of racial and ethnic dynamics in the region.)[67]

In daily life, personal relations and individual behavior mattered more than categories of difference. Years later, Jewish former coalfield residents still remember the day-to-day interactions that, to them, represent how people got along. One man stressed, "People were people. They didn't give a damn what your background was": it was how you acted that counted. He related that his father once paid for a sidewalk around a local church in Welch, "because it was needed." Once, after a coal train accident, his father bought the coal that had spilled out into the street and distributed it to the town's churches, prompting their congregations to offer prayers on his behalf. His mother helped take care of people when they were sick. "Her friends were the whole community. . . . There was no social strata. You were either decent society, or you weren't." One of his enduring memories is of men gathering every evening to talk over the events of the day at the Carter Hotel. Another man recalled how his older brother, the projectionist at their father's Keystone theater, would turn the movie machine around on Sundays and project it on the wall of the neighboring Greek restaurant, for the amusement of the townsfolk. As a boy he engaged in the usual activities available to children in Keystone. "We used to play in the streets. . . . We used to sit on the porch of our building and shoot the rats" near the creek with a .22 rifle. After school he and his friends would play baseball on a vacant lot or go to the American Legion Hall to watch the men shoot pool. [68]

Non-Jews also have memories of the kind of everyday connections with their Jewish neighbors that bind people together. A woman who married into a Jewish family noted that her in-laws Max and Dena Ofsa were well-known for their kindness. When the child of a non-Jewish friend of hers took sick, Max Ofsa appeared at the woman's door bearing "some quinine and some goose grease" from his grocery store, an act that the woman never forgot. A recent

newspaper obituary of Harlan Jewish businessman Irvin Gergely devoted many paragraphs to the reminiscences of Cawood Ledford, the former "voice of the University of Kentucky Wildcats." Ledford recounted his friendship with Gergely, which started in their 1930s Harlan boyhood: in grade school, "he had a little basketball court at his parents' home. . . . I'd take a group (of children) from my neighborhood and he'd get a group from near his home and we'd play on his court. We fussed more than we played, I think." The two remained close friends for sixty years. A memoir written by a former Pocahontas schoolteacher related the remarkable appearance of Jenny Baach as townspeople gathered outside during a fire late one night in 1921:

> In minutes the streets were jammed with people in all stages of dress and undress. To our amazement, Mrs. Sol Baach appeared perfectly groomed even to her red carnation in her beautiful hair. That carnation was such a constant companion that I never saw her without it. What a loveable person she was! She came to Pocahontas as a dancing teacher, and her lighthearted spirit and love for her friends was so etched into her magnetic character that everyone loved her. No visitor ever left her home without a gift of some sort. Her hospitality and beautiful parties are still a pleasant memory to me.

Jenny Baach was indeed noted for the social gatherings held at her home, The Maples. According to a 1916 society column item, she "served in style, as everyone familiar with Mrs. Baach's way of entertaining knows." Interestingly, in 1920 Jenny Baach served as the town's census taker. One wonders if she wore her trademark red carnation in her hair as she trooped the streets of her small mining town, recording the residents of homes and boarding houses.[69]

Jenny Baach happened to be an American-born German Jew, but clearly most East European Jewish immigrants proved just as able to intermix in the coalfield town social scene. Yet not all members of the immigrant generation cared to mix with non-Jews. A significant

minority attempted to keep their socializing entirely within the Jewish community. Jake Levine, pioneering Jewish merchant of Williamson, once admonished his young clerk Harry Schwachter, "You've got no business fooling around so much with those 'goyim' all the time." Levine was not alone; in interviews, both Jews and non-Jews mentioned that some members of coalfield Jewish communities displayed a certain amount of "clannishness." Behind this attitude lurked a longstanding Jewish distrust of gentiles based on centuries of harsh experience, coupled with a reaction to undercurrents of prejudice emanating from the local environment.[70]

Conversely, their attitude also reflected a fear of *too much* acceptance—in the form of intermarriage, an outcome dreaded by most immigrant parents and a very real possibility since their children had such a small pool of fellow Jews to draw from. Two women recalled that their mothers tried to discourage friendships with non-Jews precisely for that reason. Schwachter believed that Levine had been urged to speak out by the town's "Yiddisha mamas," who did not want an eligible Jewish male to slip away from them. (They need not have worried. He ended up marrying Levine's niece, Rosa Brown.) In later years, Jewish newcomers to the coalfields would continue to feel a greater sense of distance from gentiles than home-grown Jewish members of the second and third generations, who blended more easily into the local social milieu.[71]

To some newly-arrived Jewish women, who had lived more insulated lives within Jewish communities in New York or Baltimore or Eastern Europe than the men, their new surroundings could seem quite foreign at first and they felt they had little in common with their neighbors. This was especially true for those who settled in the smaller mining towns. As one woman stated, "I can't tell you how my mother reacted coming from Brooklyn, New York, to Scarbro, West Virginia" around 1910. Her mother in fact exclaimed to her husband, "'You brought me to a wilderness!'" Though she was mostly referring to conditions such as the lack of plumbing and

the cows and pigs that coexisted with the hamlet's human inhabitants, she also had in mind the lack of other Jewish people. That did not stop her daughter from making friends; in later years she vividly recalled the two hundred steps she had to climb to visit her best friend, the daughter of a Polish coal miner. Her mother, on the other hand, did not have much of a social life until the family moved to Beckley. For city-bred women, even the county seats took some getting used to. Nineteen-year-old Esther Sturm was visiting her aunt and uncle in Pineville in 1915 when her parents decided to move the family there from New York. "When I found out . . . I cried for a week," she later declared. "But then I made the best of it."[72]

The second half of her statement sums up the attitude of most women. Although on the whole they never did find the coalfields as congenial as men (who were more likely to find fulfillment as business owners and civic leaders), most managed to make the adjustment quite well. They put much of their considerable energy into organizing communally, but did not remain sheltered behind their ethnic associations. Jewish women as well as men mixed with their coalfield neighbors, and those from pioneering families were accorded particular respect.[73]

Esther Sturm Baloff soon entered into the social life of Pineville, even joining a church choir at the invitation of her new friends. She went on to become an integral part of the community in LaFollette and concluded that she and her family "had a good life there." Pauline Josephy (sister of Joe Herzbrun's wife Mary) arrived in Welch with her husband in the town's early days. When she died in 1920 at age forty-seven, the *McDowell Recorder* noted that her "untimely death caused a shadow of sincere sorrow to sweep the entire city" and the Methodist Women's Missionary Society passed a resolution expressing "its love for and appreciation of [her] life and beautiful character." Goldie Koslow, a Lithuanian immigrant who came to the U.S. as a child, served on McDowell County's Republican Executive Committee. Says her son, "I

guess she thought it was part of the Americanization process." Jewish women found myriad ways to involve themselves in town life—from individual acts of neighborliness to participating in political and charitable activities to serving as social and civic leaders.[74]

Pressed to describe the non-Jews they socialized with, interviewees acknowledged that when they referred to "everyone" in town, they primarily meant others in their same class position: merchants, doctors, lawyers, teachers, middle- to upper-level coal company, railroad, and courthouse employees, and the like. This could and did include individual friendships with African Americans in towns where a black middle class contingent existed, though any kind of formal socializing in the coalfields was racially segregated. But it did not usually include the people who formed the bulk of the region's workforce. Since few coal miners actually lived in county seat towns before mid century, Jews in the county seats had little contact with mining families except as customers who came to town on Saturdays.[75]

Jews in other independent towns, much closer to the mines, had a more diverse class acquaintance. Harry Berman grew up in Matewan, West Virginia, in the 1910s and 1920s. His family and the town's one other Jewish family enjoyed close relations with local miners and other townspeople. "My father was always . . . in with the union people," Berman recalled in an interview taped in the 1980s. "He liked them all. . . . People were nice. They were friendly. . . . They liked us there, and they done a lot of tradin' there, in the store." The town's most famous union man, police chief Sid Hatfield, "used to come and visit quite a bit in the store and talk," Berman said. "He was a likeable fellow."[76]

Nevertheless, if a recognizable middle class existed in their small town, Jewish families associated primarily with the others who occupied it. The geography of coal towns reinforced

social separation, since miners usually lived in company housing apart from the other residents, often literally "on the other side of the tracks." Jews in the smallest or more remote mining towns, where almost all of the population consisted of coal miners and their families, had no middle class to join. They maintained friendly relations with their neighbors and their children might play with the other children, but they looked to the nearest Jewish community for their socializing. Indeed, one reason for the move to the county seats was to be closer to a Jewish community with which they could associate.[77]

Newspaper "society" sections provide clues to the position of Jews in the social structure. In Middlesboro, in Pocahontas, and in McDowell County, as well as in some of the New River towns of Fayette County during that area's pre-World War I heyday, Jews were often mentioned in society column blurbs: visiting with each other, entertaining local and out-of-town guests, making trips out of the region to buy goods for their business or visit big-city relatives. Full-fledged articles in the *McDowell Recorder* kept Welch readers abreast of the news that "Miss Klein Entertains" ("refreshments were served in keeping with the holiday of Passover"), that the Herzbruns were "persuaded to dance a real old time foreign dance" at their thirty-fifth anniversary party, that the "Wagner-Totz Wedding" was "a Brilliant Affair." Jewish weddings were described in excruciating detail, from floral arrangements to honeymoon plans, with often a sentence or two describing the "pretty Hebrew ring ceremony" or the "strictly Orthodox Hebrew" proceedings. Though these disclosures offer evidence of Jews' respectability, their meaning is somewhat ambiguous: almost all the guests at these various events were Jewish.[78]

At the least, their frequent appearance in print confirms that they made up a fair-sized proportion of the middle class in many places. Some days, they seemed to have constituted the *entire* "society set" of their towns. For example, the *Fayette Journal*'s "Sewell Notes" of August

8, 1901, had but four items, all featuring Jewish women visiting or being visited by out-of-town relatives. Six of nine "Kimball Items" in the *McDowell Recorder* on January 26, 1912, involved Jews; seven of fifteen "Keystone Items" on August 22, 1913. It would be misleading, however, to characterize most of the brief newspaper column items as coverage of actual society events, at least not in the sense of "high" society. Many of them were along the lines of this 1919 disclosure about a Jewish butcher: "Sol Kaufman, the well-known meat man from Kimball, was here on business Monday." Even the comings and goings of local Jewish clerks received attention: in 1905, for example, the *Middlesboro News* reported that "Sam Zinberg, who has been clerking for the Weinstein boys, is now taking in the money at Dave's." [79]

The inclusion of such plebeian items reveals not only the status of Jews, but also the less-than-polished nature of the coalfield social scene. Other Jewish-related sources corroborate this larger picture. In an article recounting his experiences clerking at his uncle Dave Scott's store in Wilcoe in the late 1920s, Irving Alexander provides a vivid depiction of the little coal town's leading citizen, J. B. Smith, who lived in "the only really elegant house in town" with a "patrician wife" and two children away at college. J. B. made his living as a railroad agent, scrip dealer, chicken dealer, and unabashed pilferer of coal from the coal trains that passed through town. Even in the county seats, the "society set" was a bit rough around the edges: when Harry Schwachter first arrived in Williamson he boarded with the Stratton family and was surprised to find out that the Strattons were considered among the "socially elite" in town, "despite their accommodations for paying guests."[80]

Yet, aside from Welch in McDowell County, the doings of Jews in the county seats were not nearly as well-reported as in the other independent towns—reflecting not only their smaller proportion in the population, but also the existence of a more stratified social structure. In

Williamson, Logan, Beckley, and Harlan, Jewish social events received respectful but much less frequent coverage. These towns actually did have a "high society," and Jews were not, for the most part, members. Nor were they absolutely excluded; though their position in the middle class was secure, their status in regard to the elite was less clear. They may have been accepted as town-building contributors, but not necessarily as social equals—especially in the early years, as many immigrants had yet to shed their Yiddish accents and foreign ways. In Williamson, the socially ambitious Harry Schwachter became the first Jew "to crash the society set" in the 1910s by flaunting his dancing talent and pursuing a career as "an eligible young white-collar man about town." According to his daughter, other Jews "resented the fact that Dad was invited to all the elite affairs of the 'upper crust.' No Jew had ever attended the dances and parties given by the so-called four hundred—at least not with such regular attendance!" Even in Welch the newspaper items about Jewish social life usually concerned Jewish-only events. Aside from the Herzbruns, Jewish names rarely appeared in items about more rarefied social occasions.[81]

The second generation too faced some social exclusion by town elites, though sentiment against Jewish participation in the upper reaches of society was far from unitary. In Beckley, Jews were not admitted to some social clubs until the late 1940s. When the first Jew was nominated for country club membership in the 1950s, the board held a lengthy and heated meeting before deciding to accept him. In Williamson for many years Jews could not join the Elks club. Then one of the older members died, and suddenly Jews were admitted. (They joined because they wanted to gamble.) As late as the 1970s it was rumored that the town's Mountain Club had been created so the wealthy could have one club that did not accept Jews. Yet they had little problem joining the town's other fraternal groups, and in fact one year three Jewish men were president of three clubs at the same time. One Jewish man observed that the town's

diversity helped limit social stratification, since there were so many newcomers, all striving to build new lives: "Williamson didn't have the problems that a lot of towns have. Because it was settled by so many different ethnic groups, they just wanted to make it a better place to live."[82]

Notwithstanding occasional social discrimination, Jewish men and women from county seats to smaller towns participated in the civic, charitable, and recreational activities that characterized small-town middle class life. Men joined a wide range of fraternal and service clubs, as well as veterans groups such as the American Legion and VFW. Women belonged to their town's Women's Club. They participated in the PTA, Girl Scouts, League of Women Voters, "female auxiliaries." Men and women joined recreational groups such as bridge, tennis, music, garden, and book clubs. The smaller the town, the smaller the pool of middle class people such groups could draw from. The effect was to bring Jews and non-Jews close together, as they constantly encountered the same people through volunteer and leisure activities. As one non-Jewish woman from War observed, "In a small place, you've got the same people working in every organization. . . . It didn't matter about their religion, they all worked together."[83]

Many Jewish men and women held leadership positions. The Blochs and Baaches were instrumental in founding the Masonic Lodge in Pocahontas in 1883; Harry Kammer of Williamson, Irving Goldstein of Beckley, and Emanuel Katzen of Welch (son of Isadore), served as commanders of their American Legion posts in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, respectively. A 1972 study of Williamson Jews recorded that a remarkable 76 percent of men belonged to four or more non-Jewish organizations and 65 percent of women belonged to at least one; 35 percent of both men and women held leadership posts at the time the study was conducted.[84]

Some Jews became local philanthropists, earning reputations for their contributions to

hospitals, libraries, and parks. During both world wars, Jewish merchants vied with other business owners to exhibit their patriotism: in 1917 Welch theater owner Eugene Lopinsky "merited praise . . . for his generous and patriotic action in giving a Red Cross benefit show," while Simon Solins's pledge of five percent of his July receipts to the same organization prompted the *McDowell Recorder* to warn: "In this patriotic act, he has taken the lead. Other businesses will be asked to contribute likewise." Some people focused on civic projects; in the 1950s, attorney Maurice Herzbrun and Nora Beldner Franks, manager of the Welch Social Security office, played important roles in the creation of the McDowell County Library while attorney Sam Solins served as president of the board.[85]

Jewish support for cultural institutions and activities reflected a mixture of middlebrow, middle-class concerns with a longstanding Jewish cultural interest in books, music, and the arts. Bluefield, regional center for the coalfields, maintained a symphony orchestra which had several Jewish founders and members. A woman whose mother played the violin in the orchestra recalled that music was "a big part of our lives." Jewish parents enthusiastically enrolled their children in music lessons, with boys as well as girls were drawn into this (for them, dubious) pursuit. Ken Bank's parents sent him to Bluefield every week for violin lessons, which no doubt provided a contrast to shooting at rats from his Keystone front porch. Harry Schwachter's daughter related that "as children we took piano lessons faithfully," with her brother "one of the very few boys who participated in Miss Lovelace's Musicale in 1929." This was no acceptable occupation for a young Williamson male, and he suffered such intense embarrassment that his parents relented and allowed him to quit. One of Harry Schwachter's chief enthusiasms was the annual Chautauqua program (a nationwide effort that brought cultural programming to small towns during the summer in the form of plays, concerts, and lectures for adults and children).

Naturally, he served as president of the local Chautauqua board—and even offered his own speech to local groups on "Poets from Homer to the Present Age."[86]

Other coalfield Jews shared Schwachter's love of books. For some men in the immigrant generation, this love grew out of their religious training. One woman recalled that her devout grandfather, the mechanic, plumber, and grocer Max Ofsa, "always had his head stuck in a book." Other men, such as Northfork merchant Raymond Seligman, were revered by local Jews for their religious scholarship. In the secular realm this preoccupation translated into a belief in educational achievement that immigrant parents passed on to their children. A Northfork native ascribed his parents' emphasis on education not just to Jewish cultural values, but to the more general desire of immigrants to see their children get ahead in their new country. Whatever the reason, he noted that "Jewish students were good students. We excelled." (Both he and his sister were valedictorians.) When Ruth Herzbrun received the highest grade in the state on an eighth grade exam in 1914, the *McDowell Recorder* proudly noted that "Her parents are both Hungarian Jews, but Miss Ruth was born here in Welch." Some Jews extended their zeal for education into the larger community; in 1922, jeweler Harry Einsohn sponsored a contest for the best student essays on the history of Welch.[87]

In contributing to the cultural life of the region, Jews had an advantage stemming from their economic role. As historian Lewis Atherton has pointed out, small-town merchants were among the more worldly citizens of their towns because, unlike most of the population, they traveled to large cities on a regular basis. Just as their economic niche enabled Jews to serve as conveyors of modern culture via their importation of consumer goods, so did it enable them to promote the trappings of modern culture in their role as neighbors. Buying trips and visits to relatives in big cities made Jews more aware of mainstream cultural developments than most other coalfield

residents, especially in the early years, before the mass media made inroads into small town America. They returned from these trips with news of the latest fashions, music, and dances. As a young man, Harry Schwachter furthered his social ambitions by giving dance lessons to members of the town's elite—after visiting friends and relatives in Cincinnati to brush up on all the latest popular dances. Later he participated in local amateur theatricals; one such program featured "Schwachter and Crank" performing "Up-to-Date Society Dances."[88]

Second- and third-generation coalfield Jews were able to extend their social reach to typical American activities that their parents could not have participated in. In the early 1930s, for example, radio station manager Alice Shein served as president of the Williamson High School Alumni Association. Many young people became involved in sports: in the 1920s, Charles Sameth captained and starred on the Welch high school football team while Bessie Levinson starred on the girl's basketball team. Sam Abrams played on the semi-pro Middlesboro Allens basketball team in 1947. There weren't enough Jewish boys in Welch in 1921 to form their own basketball team in the local Sunday School League, but the "Consolidated" team, made up of miscellaneous congregations, featured a roster that was more than half Jewish, including guard "Punk" Herzbrun. Both the Logan and Beckley congregations did manage to field basketball teams in their towns' adult church leagues in the 1920s and 1940s, respectively.[89]

Much of the involvement of Jews in the social and civic life of county seat towns occurred through their own organizations: congregations, B'nai B'rith lodges for men, Sisterhoods (or their precursors, Hebrew Ladies Aid Societies) for women. These communal groups constituted the most important affiliation for the overwhelming majority of coalfield Jews, and with good reason. On one hand, they reinforced Jewish group cohesion and identity while providing the

framework for a lively internal Jewish social life. On the other, they served as an admirable vehicle for Jews to connect with the society around them. As historians of American Jewry have noted, religious-based organizations were the height of small town respectability and Jewish communal groups conformed substantially to those of their middle class Christian counterparts. Paradoxically, therefore, they enabled Jews to maintain their distinct cultural identity and blend into the larger social milieu at the same time. In fact, at first lacking their own group, some Jews were tempted, for purely social reasons, to throw in with the Christians: the Jewish women in Welch belonged to the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodists before organizing a group of their own in 1915, the Welch Hebrew Ladies Aid Society.[90]

Newspaper coverage offers evidence of the success their communal organizations achieved in legitimizing coalfield Jewish communities in the eyes of their Christian neighbors, while confirming the importance of Jewish social events as grist for the society column mill. Frequent *McDowell Recorder* articles about the Welch men's and ladies' aid societies highlighted the groups' worthy charitable aims and "delightful" social activities. In 1911, the *Recorder* noted that Keystone's "Manhattan Social Club has announced its annual Purim Ball," and "all who attend are assured a most enjoyable time" at "the biggest dance of the year." When the Welch Sisterhood hosted a state convention of Jewish women's groups in 1933, the *Welch Daily News* called it "the most brilliant social affair to be held in Welch this season." While McDowell County Jews received the most coverage, newspapers in other coalfield counties also occasionally devoted space to Jewish communal activities.[91]

Though their communal groups mostly occupied themselves with internal matters, they also engaged broader community activities. Charitable work was divided along gender lines. The Ladies Aid Societies and Sisterhoods worked with their female Christian counterparts, while the

men's B'nai B'rith lodges conducted their own activities. To support local causes, such as flood relief in Williamson and the TB hospital in Beckley, the women held bazaars and rummage sales, ran booths at the Elks carnival, and alternated with other women's groups operating the check room at society functions. The men took a more masculine approach: in Beckley the B'nai B'rith chapter's popular fundraising event, a wrestling show featuring national wrestling stars, attracted some four thousand people to the high school stadium annually in the 1940s and 1950s. The wrestlers "used to put on one wild show," recalled a former member. The event raised money for a vocational guidance program at two county high schools, charities such as the VA hospital, and the group's emergency fund for local Jews in need of financial assistance.[92]

World War II and the immediate postwar years saw the greatest involvement of Jewish groups in local charitable and civic activities, as coalfield Jews became caught up in the patriotic mood sweeping the country. Women rolled bandages and took turns with other women's groups in volunteering at local USOs. Congregations conducted paper drives, purchased war bonds, held patriotic programs featuring their Boy Scouts. In 1940 the Logan B'nai B'rith lodge presented an American flag to the county's African American high school, with a lodge member offering a speech on Americanism with heavy reference to Lincoln, Washington, and American traditions of tolerance, democracy, and liberty. Meanwhile, the McDowell County B'nai B'rith chapter heard talks by local black leaders in 1944 and 1945, with attorney Harry Capehart presenting "a most interesting talk on the subject of 'The effects and benefits of this world war to the minority groups of people.'"[93] After the war the Beckley B'nai B'rith lodge's "Americanism committee" began conducting citizenship classes "for the preparation of the foreign-born, or aliens, in Raleigh County, both Jewish as well as non-Jewish, for becoming naturalized citizens." This popular program, led by second-generation Beckley Jews, soon spread to other lodges in West

Virginia. The state's B'nai B'rith newsletter reported of one volunteer in 1955, "With his coaching and sympathetic understanding, 186 aliens have become American citizens. Not one person who attended his classes failed to pass the examination."[94]

The civic and charitable work of Jewish individuals and communal groups often involved engaging with the dominant Christianity of the region. Having their own groups helped them participate in Christian-oriented civic activities: they were able to contribute in a spirit of interfaith cooperation, without regarding their involvement as compromising their identities or beliefs. Thus when a local fraternal lodge presented a check to Pamela White "to help her become a missionary," three of the six smiling men in a photo of the event were leaders of Welch's Temple Emanuel. The Sisterhoods collected rummage for the Salvation Army, contributed to the YMCA, distributed Christmas baskets to the poor during the Great Depression (in Williamson in 1931 they purchased fifty sacks of cornmeal, two hundred pounds of beans, and forty-five pounds of bacon). Some Welch Jewish men belonged to the Santa's Helpers. The board of the Williamson congregation in 1938 did vote down Harry Schwachter's proposal to donate to the Mountain Mission School at Grundy—but by the narrow margin of twelve to eleven. In Bluefield, Jewish civic leaders concerned with strengthening their city's institutional base were quite willing to overlook religious differences. According to the dean of the local Baptist junior college, "two of the three men who were instrumental in getting Bluefield College located in Bluefield were men who belonged to the Jewish synagogue . . . and served on the committee to go to the Virginia Baptist General Association when it was known that Baptists were going to build a school somewhere in this area."[95]

The spirit of interfaith cooperation worked both ways, as non-Jews contributed to projects important to their Jewish neighbors. When World War I brought devastation to East European

Jewry, American Jews responded with a nationwide relief effort that relied on grassroots support from around the country. McDowell County's Jewish Relief Fund received donations from non-Jews, both black and white, and the 1918 relief committee included local gentile business leaders on its board. Christians also contributed to campaigns to build local synagogues. When the Welch congregation formed in 1918, the *McDowell Recorder* urged the support of the larger community, noting that "It is well known that [local Jews] are always ready to help in everything that will benefit our hustling town. Whenever called upon to contribute to charity and to any other good cause they have always responded with a spirit that has won the respect of all our citizens." One-quarter of the funds for the construction of Williamson's synagogue in the mid 1920s came from local Christians. In later years, non-Jews contributed to the United Jewish Appeal campaigns mounted by several coalfield Jewish organizations.[96]

Jewish Social Integration in the Coalfields in Larger Context

Immigrant-peddler-turned-merchant David Brown of Williamson "was never a great financial success, but was a landmark as one of the pioneers of the community," writes his granddaughter, Marilou Schwachter Sniderman. Though religion played an important part in his life, "his God was most undemanding." When Brown could no longer climb the many steps to the Williamson synagogue, he "transferred his diligent and prompt attendance" to the ground-level First Presbyterian Church. "He enjoyed those Sunday services and extolled the praises of the preacher and congregation to all his cronies, who were amused, and to my parents, who were both embarrassed and outraged." But more embarrassed by the social transgression than outraged by the religious one, Sniderman implies:

> "Oh, Papa," mother would fume. "How can you sit there, week after week, when they sing their praises to Jesus? You've always been a good Jew. You know you don't believe in the

> doctrines of the Presbyterian Church." . . . Papa would answer absent-mindedly, "I like to go there, and they like to have me, too. Why, just last Sunday they had a brand new spittoon for me on the front seat where I always sit." Mother shrieked, "Papa, you didn't spit on the floor in that church!" Papa's small habits of untidiness had long been a source of great irritation to my parents, and they considered the loathsome tobacco chewing a cardinal sin. "Well now, I useta," Papa answered blithely. "I don't reckon you'd expect me to swallow it. But I don't anymore since I have my own spittoon. And you don't have to worry about me praying to Jesus either, Rosie. He was a right smart Jew and I always thought a lot of him." Mother wailed, "Oh, Papa, the whole town is laughing at you, and I just know the Presbyterians are fit to be tied!" "Nope," he answered, as he tucked his slightly soiled shirt into the shabby trousers, "they like me just fine. And I've got a few ideas of my own, too. Everytime they sing 'Jesus,' I sing 'Moses' or 'Abraham' just as loud as can be. I tell you, Rosie, the singing is really fine. Nobody seems to mind." And indeed, nobody did, outside of Mother and Dad. Still, I recall that when the new Presbyterian Church was built, the folks gave a substantial donation.[97]

The contrast between David Brown and his daughter Rosa Schwachter encapsulates the contrast between the first generation of respected pioneers and/or coarse immigrants and the more proper middle class second generation. It also illustrates the increasing desire for respectability on the part of Jewish coalfield residents in response to changing social dynamics, and incidentally highlights the continuing acceptance of difference on the part of larger society that remained a feature of the region's social life.

Jews played a wide ranging role in the coalfield social scene. The general trajectory of their involvement was from rough boomtown immigrant to respectable member of the county seat middle class within one or two generations, yet there were plenty of exceptions to this geographic and chronological journey. Perhaps the most accurate generalization that can be made is that Jews felt free to follow their inclinations on how to relate to non-Jews. Some, like

Jake Levine, preferred to keep their interaction to a minimum aside from economic dealings. Others, like Rose Schwachter's husband Harry, were "determined to crash the society set."

Most fell somewhere in between. They engaged in the social life of their towns as friends, neighbors, members of organizations, and contributors to town development while their ties to their local Jewish community remained their most important social connection. The result was summed up by a Jewish woman who, describing Williamson from the 1940s through 1970s, stated, "There was a very active Jewish social life and there was a very integrated social life [with non-Jews] as well." That Jews mostly socialized amongst themselves can be attributed to multiple factors: their own choice, the general tendency for ethnic and religious groups in the region to congregate amongst their own, dynamics of race and class, and social exclusion in the upper reaches of society that was based in part on prejudice (see chapter 6).[98]

The wide open atmosphere of the classic coalfield boomtowns, which tolerated all kinds of people and all kinds of behavior, was not duplicated to quite the same extent in the county seats, where a more traditional small town social structure developed. Yet the county seats too offered an environment that encouraged Jewish involvement in civic and social life, as newcomers from a variety of backgrounds merged with a small pre-existing population whose elite segment was even smaller still. As coalfield scholar Mary Beth Pudup has observed, the region's town-based middle to upper classes needed help from the outside to "accomplish what they were unable to do themselves, namely the capitalist transformation of the countryside." Though she focuses primarily on the "help" provided by absentee investors in the coal industry, her point applies equally to all the new arrivals, from the majority who joined the industrial labor force to the minority, among them Jews, who brought commercial experience and connections, entrepreneurial ambitions, and a belief in progress that accorded with the designs of the local

elite. These particular contributions ensured their acceptance into the middle class.[99]

In assessing their impact on California Gold Rush towns, Robert Levinson asserts that Jews contributed to building up the physical and social infrastructure of their raw towns with the goal of advancing permanency, the rule of law, and, generally, "civilizing tendencies." Their economic niche gave them an interest in promoting measures that would provide a stable climate for business and maximize possibilities for commercial growth. They built solid brick edifices that symbolized stability; they supported the establishment of local governments, town incorporation, and other such trappings of civilization. Though the primary engine of change was the process of gold exploitation, in their niche as traders, Jews "helped in the rise of urban society and the growth of cities" while the most successful among them joined the ranks of "the leading citizens of their communities."[100]

The social, civic, and political activities of Jews in the southern coalfields followed along the same lines and for the same reasons. Their position as merchants and town property owners (or people who aspired to those roles) gave them the motivation and the means to enter into the civic and social life of their towns. Moreover, as capitalists of the non-absentee variety—resident families with a stake in their communities—they had further incentive to get involved. Though their non-participation in the coal industry and their minority status limited their potential to influence the region's development, their efforts did have an impact on the urbanization process taking place in coalfield centers. And although most Jewish men and women joined the ranks of the middle class, a few reached a higher level of prominence and influence.

The experience of other small Jewish communities across the U.S. provides a context for understanding the dynamics of Jewish-gentile interaction in the coalfields. The generally open

attitude of coalfield society toward the Jewish minority stands in contrast to the situation in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, whose East European Jewish community was established during the very same era. According to Ewa Morawska, the town's entrenched and hierarchical social structure tolerated Jews, but did not welcome their full participation. They remained socially segregated, their contacts with non-Jews frequent but superficial. Involvement in political and civic life was minimal; the Jewish community felt constrained to keep a low profile. At the other extreme, German Jews in the wide open gold mining town of Eureka, Nevada, in the late 1870s found complete acceptance from the larger society, says historian Norton Stern. They played a leadership role in every area of town life. Unlike coalfield Jews, even their social activities were thoroughly integrated, with the annual Purim Ball serving as a major event on the town's social calendar. The coalfield Jewish experience perhaps more closely matches that of the German and East European Jewish community of Wichita, Kansas, as described by Hal Rothman: the first Jews arrived "before the platting of the town." They found a high degree of social and public acceptance and mixed easily with non-Jews, yet their social events tended to be all-Jewish affairs. Rothman notes that the lack of an established hierarchy facilitated Jewish involvement in civic life, but does not speculate as to why their social events remained segregated. [101]

Morawska maintains that the economic marginality of the Jews of Johnstown (meaning, their non-participation in the dominant industry), their tendency to immerse themselves in their own social life, the Christian-based culture of the larger society, the ethnic stratification of Johnstown, and the existence of mild anti-semitism kept Jews apart from others. All those factors pertained in the coalfields and many other sites of small Jewish communities to some degree, yet with distinctly different results. In accounting for this discrepancy, several variables can be identified that influenced Jewish involvement in the social milieu of small cities and towns.[102]

First, the existence of what might be described as a "boomtown atmosphere" greatly encouraged the absorption of Jews into the broader social sphere: high levels of integration were found in areas of new settlement, rapid economic expansion, and population growth; in areas that lacked an entrenched elite or a rigid social hierarchy; where contributions from outsiders were needed to advance elites' notions of progress; and where Jews were present from the beginning as town pioneers. This set of conditions trumped other factors, such as region, town size, or origins of the Jewish population. The New South city of Birmingham, Alabama, and its Jewish community were both founded in 1871 and, according to Mark Elovitz, its German Jewish pioneers "could and did speedily enter the mainstream of local activities." Some Mississippi Delta towns offered similar conditions to the German and Alsatian Jews who settled there in the antebellum era. Historians of western American Jewry have observed the same phenomena in places as large as San Francisco and as small as the gold mining towns of California and Nevada. In general, the German Jews who settled in the growing towns of the Midwest, South, and West benefited from the timing of their mid century arrival. East European Jews migrated during a later period after most of the continental U.S. had passed out of the "frontier" stage; however, those who ventured to the remaining areas of new growth, such as the coalfields, found similar circumstances and exhibited similar patterns of social interaction.[103]

Second, where ethnic diversity reigned—often the case in boomtowns—and recognition of the contributions of different ethnic groups resulted in a certain cosmopolitanism, the likelihood of Jewish integration was even higher. Such ethnic diversity was more prevalent in the West than in the South, but did characterize the southern coalfields. Heterogeneity inhibited the pressure to conform which often characterized small towns, since there was no well-established single norm to conform to. Louis Schmier has observed that the East European Jews of Valdosta, Georgia,

chose to remain separate from the general population in part because they perceived that only total assimilation, resulting in loss of their Jewish identity, would enable them to win acceptance. The East European Jews who lived in the coalfields had no such concerns. They remained unselfconsciously Jewish while entering into the larger society around them.[104]

A third variable is purely demographic: the size of their towns and the proportion of Jews in the population influenced Jewish-gentile interaction. This is clearly demonstrated within the coalfields. Among West Virginia county seat towns, Jews were most thoroughly involved in the social scene in Welch, where they made up their largest percentage of the population, followed by Williamson. In Logan and Beckley, where their percentage was smaller, they were less active in civic and social life and experienced a greater degree of exclusion.

The smaller the size of the town, the more familiar the residents were with each other ("everybody knew everybody else"), and the more members of the small, multi-ethnic middle class relied on each other for their social activity, as friends, neighbors, and members of civic and social clubs. Jewish communities in small towns (in the coalfields and elsewhere) were more comfortable, played more of a civic leadership role, were more integrated into the social scene, and experienced less social exclusion than those in small-to-medium-sized cities. Studies of Jewish communities in Knoxville, Atlanta, and other cities reveal a greater sense of insecurity, of concern about the perceptions of gentiles and the need to establish and maintain respectability. These Jews exhibited a greater impulse to be inconspicuous, to not rock the boat. Their tendency was to avoid any kind of controversy even when they played a prominent civic role. In contrast, Jews in the coalfields, as their boomtown activities show, did not seem at all bothered about how they were viewed by others—at least in the early years. This relative lack of concern on the part the first generation did give way in later years, as town populations grew, the percentage of Jews

shrank, and the boomtown atmosphere yielded to a more settled and stratified environment in which respectability became increasingly important.[105]

Many historians of American Jewry attribute variations in social integration to cultural differences between German and East European Jews. German Jewish immigrants, though they arrived in the U.S. with the same Orthodoxy as the Eastern Europeans, came from a culture less insular and less steeped in religious tradition. They were more comfortable with the process of assimilation (which had advanced farther in Germany than in Eastern Europe) and less foreign in appearance than East European Jewish immigrants. Even in the coalfields, differences between German and East European Jews can be discerned. German families such as the Blochs, Baaches, and Midleburgs showed much less interest in Jewish communal activity and blended more thoroughly than others into the coalfield elite.[106]

But many studies posit a far greater dichotomy between German and East European Jews than was evident in the coalfields. Reviewing the civic involvement of Jews in Birmingham, Elovitz refers solely to German Jews. Later-arriving East Europeans, in contrast, "remained quite unknown and strange to the existing Birmingham community." Schmier notes that while German Jews adjusted easily to life in Valdosta, the Eastern Europeans were the ones with doubts about assimilation and in fact exhibited a "shtetl mentality." John Livingston, writing of Jews in the American West, cites "the region's initial cosmopolitanism, the Jewish pioneer role in the founding of many western towns, [and] the absence of large numbers of eastern European immigrants" as reasons for their high level of acceptance and integration. The implication is that East European Jews were both less willing because of their cultural predilections, and less able because of their foreign ways, to mix with non-Jews.[107]

Yet this factor may have played a less important role than structural variables such as town

size and stage of town development at the time each Jewish population first arrived. Rothman, for one, maintains that the Eastern Europeans, though more foreign-seeming than their German co-religionists, followed generally the same pattern as Germans in integrating into Wichita society. And Stern insists that much of the Jewish population in the American West was not actually "German" at all, but hailed from Prussian Poland, whose Jews lagged behind those from other German lands in modernization and assimilation. [108]

Certainly the East European Jews of the coalfields belie the view that East European immigrants, by nature, had difficulty assimilating. It seems likely that timing, as much as point of origin, could account for differences in how Jews adapted to their surroundings. In Birmingham and Valdosta conditions may have changed between the arrival of the Germans and the Eastern Europeans: a more stratified social structure may have already developed, and opportunities may have been more along the lines of filling a particular ethnic niche or economic gap (such as catering to black customers in the South, or Slavic and Hungarian industrial workers in Johnstown) rather than serving as town pioneers in a relatively wide open society.

Regional differences too may have been overemphasized by historians in accounting for variations in Jewish social integration. Region did play a role: in the coalfields, Central Appalachia's rural character, its fervent Christianity, and race relations that partook of a southern sensibility (but only to a certain extent) affected Jewish-gentile interaction, as will be seen in chapter 6. Nevertheless, parallels between the coalfield Jewish experience and that of Jewish communities in other parts of the country suggest that, as Mark Bauman and Bobbie Malone have written, "region may not play the key role" and that "a variety of patterns which transcend region" may be discerned in analyzing the adaptation of Jews to their American environments. In the realm of Appalachian history, these same parallels argue against a bit of "received wisdom"

that scholars now view as pure myth: the idea of Appalachian "exceptionalism."[109]

Yet, even though Jews in the coalfields enjoyed a relatively open environment which allowed them to integrate while feeling free to retain their distinct identity, forces both internal and external created a certain amount of social tension and ambivalence. Within individuals who grew up in the region, questions of self-definition arose. Separated from others by their families' religion, means of livelihood, and cultural background, many struggled with the implications of being in, but not completely of, their hometowns. Within Jewish families and communities, as integration shaded into assimilation, divisions appeared over how Jewish identity should be expressed: which cultural practices should be retained, and how? which should be altered, or dropped altogether? Communal and familial conflicts reflected differences of gender, of generation, of length of residency in the region. Meanwhile, the surrounding society offered its own challenges for the small Jewish population to grapple with: what are the limits of social acceptance? what terms and conditions have been subtly imposed? And of particular concern in the coalfields, how should Jews respond to the larger social conflicts that consumed the region but did not directly involve them? Frequent periods of intense labor strife and class polarization posed a special dilemma to a people in the middle, whose friends, neighbors, and customers were busy choosing sides. These questions will be explored in the following chapters.

Notes to Chapter 4

[1] Houston Kermit Hunter, "The Story of McDowell County," *West Virginia Review* 17, no. 7 (April 1940): 169. The *West Virginia Review* was a monthly journal for a general readership that combined boosterism and local history. It promoted generally progressive, pro-business views.

[2] Rose Marino, *Welch and Its People* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Press, 1985), 41; *McDowell Recorder*, September 3 and 14, 1920; "No Slowing Down for Veteran Businessman," *Williamson Daily News*, July 30, 1993, 17a.

[3] Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983), 189; Milton Koslow, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 13 May 1998; *West Virginia Blue Book* 1924-1944 (Charleston: Clerk of the Senate); "Weinstein Brothers," *Picturesque Middlesboro, The Magic City* (Middlesboro: *Pinnacle News*, n.d.).

[4] "Lon Eubanks Shot in Raid on Speakeasy," September 3, 1915, "Unfortunate Homicide," October 6, 1916, "Officers Capture Liquor," May 18, 1917, "Prohibition Sleuths Make Many Hauls," July 13, 1917, *McDowell Recorder*; "Prohibition Officers Raid in Keystone, June 30, 1916, "Captured!" July 7, 1916, *McDowell Times*; William D. Forester, *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties* (n.p.: 1986), 113 (first quote); "Jury Demands City Officers End Gambling," *Middlesboro Daily News*, June 22, 1934 (second quote); "Middlesboro History" column, *Middlesboro Daily News*, June 30, August 1, August 4 (third quote), August 7, 1990. According to the "Middlesboro History" column of August 1, Zuta was the business manager of underworld leader Bugs Moran, whose gang was at war with Al Capone's gang.

[5] Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Moses Rischin and John Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); Robert E. Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York: Ktav, 1978); Norton B. Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 15 (October, 1982): 48-78; Hal Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon': Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865-1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83-104.

[6] Ronald D Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Charles Kenneth Sullivan, "Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979).

[7] John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 54, 57, 80.

[8] See chapter 2, note 29 for a discussion of the term "frontier" as used by American historians and applied to Appalachia.

[9] Many of the wealthiest local coal operators, as well as the region's most prominent professionals, bankers, and political leaders, resided in the town of Bramwell, located a few miles outside of Bluefield, W.Va. Legend had it that Bramwell had more millionaires per capita than any town in the country. Martha Jane Williams Becker, *Bramwell: Diary of a Millionaire Town* (Chapmanville, W.Va., 1988).

[10] Studies of Jewish communities in boomtowns from the South African diamond fields to the Australian outback, from the Amazon basin to the American West, reveal similar patterns. Hilary Rubinstein observes that in the Australian outback, "as in other frontier societies during the nineteenth century, Jews were accepted on equal terms with others seeking to tame the environment," with some becoming "well-respected figures" and "civic leaders." Paul R. Baltrop, "Early Colonial Australia, Jews, and Aborigines," in *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 91-109 (quote, 103). In "'Same Horse, New Wagon'," Hal Rothman asserts, "As citizens of a fledgling city [Wichita] that valued entrepreneurial spirit above all else, Jews were seen as logical participants in leadership and governance" (87).

See also John Simon, "The South African Jewish Experience," 67-90 in *Jewries at the Frontier*; Thomas T. Orum, "Jews and Communal Violence in the Amazon, 1835 to 1928," paper delivered at the "Jewish Experience in the Southern Americas" Conference, Tulane University, New Orleans, April 8, 2000; Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*; Rischin and Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West*; Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town."

[11] Earl Pomeroy, "On Becoming a Westerner," pp. 194-212 in Rischin and Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West* (quotes, 202, 204); Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*.

As Pomeroy notes, *some* ethnic groups clearly received better treatment than others. The frontier West was not free of xenophobia or racism; in fact, racist ideologies facilitated the appropriation of American Indian lands and enabled capitalists to justify various exploitative labor strategies devised to overcome the region's serious labor shortages. Asians especially suffered from the nativist and racist attitude of whites. See Howard Lamar, "From Bondage to Contract: Ethnic Labor in the American West, 1600-1890," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Nevertheless, the West did offer opportunity to immigrants from across both oceans as well as African Americans. One sign of the region's openness is that the West led the East in immigrant public-office holders, and in particular, Jewish public office-holders. (The nation's first Jewish governor, Mose Alexander, was elected in Idaho in 1912.)

Interestingly, while a comparison of Jews in the West and the coalfields reveals illuminating parallels, so does a comparison of other groups in these two regions. In "Unraveling the Multicultural Riddle: Clues from Southern Appalachia and Hispanic New Mexico," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall, 1996): 277-299, Mark Banker shows how outside interests in both regions used arguments about the cultural inferiority of local populations to justify the appropriation of land and resources.

[12] "N&W District Is Grossly Libeled," *McDowell Recorder*, February 9, 1912, p. 1; Gershon David Hundert, "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland," in *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from* Polin, ed. A. Polonsky (Washington, D.C.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 20-23.On the ethnic composition of the coalfields: U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, 1920; *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7, Senate Documents, 61st Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. 633* (Washington: GPO 1911), 135-166.

[13] *Fayette Journal*, August 16, 1900. *McDowell Recorder* articles: "Dr. Millner Now," February 19, 1915; "Sam Polan Goes to School," November 7, 1913; "Taps Are Sounded for Col. J. M. Lopinsky," January 30, 1914. "Col. J. M. Lopinsky," *McDowell Times*, January 23, 1914.

In "Sam Polan Goes to School," the editor's effusive remarks reveal indignation at Russia's treatment of Jews as well as admiration for Polon's accomplishments:

> Born in Russia (Sam says against his will) he was of the hated class that the powers of that mighty monarchy are even now treating with the rank cruelty and inhumanity of medieval times. . . . In this inhospitable and cruel land, an orphaned boy of tender years, and with a sister to support, he decided to go to America and make good. [After working as a laborer in Baltimore and in the coalfields] he was befriended by Hutson of Keystone, who took an interest in him, and helped him into better jobs. Later he came to Welch, where he has worked for Hutson Brothers, and become known as a great hustler. At the age of 25 he has entered the real estate business, made good, and accumulated a snug pile of money. . . . Poor, unlearned, with no knowledge of the English language, he has in ten years, or less, become one of the substantial business men of Welch.

[14] Mary Beth Pudup, "The Boundaries of Class in Preindustrial Appalachia," *Journal of Historical Geography* 15, no. 2 (1989): 139-162 (first quote 157, second quote 159), and "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 270-296 (third quote 292). Others who have discussed local elites as promoters of the coal industry include Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*. See chapter 1 on the traditional, agrarian orientation of preindustrial mountain residents.

[15] Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," 290. On coalfield county seat towns, see also Sally Maggard, "From Farmers to Miners: The Decline of Agriculture in Eastern Kentucky," in *Science and Agricultural Development*, ed. Lawrence Busch (Totowa, N.J.: Allenheld, Osmun, and Co.), 25-66; and the following *West Virginia Review* articles: "Welch—The City of Friendship" (June 1924): 16-21; "Williamson—In the Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field" (October 1924): 20-22; "Logan—A Big Little City" (November 1924): 52-59.

[16] Some examples of *McDowell Times* booster articles: "All Trains Should Stop at Keystone," May 23, 1913; "Keystone on Boom," December 5, 1913; "Boost Keystone, Stop Knocking It," January 11, 1918. On the make-up of the middle class in non-county seat towns: "Mt. Hope," *Fayette Journal*, March 14, 1901; "Flag Raising: Great Patriotic Occasion in Kimball," *McDowell Times*, April 27, 1917; "Northfork Rapidly Coming To Front," *McDowell Recorder*, September 12, 1919; "Northfork-Clark Is 1200 Town," *McDowell Recorder*, June 30, 1922.

[17] Jerome Paul David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town: A Sociological Study of Jewish Identification" (M.A. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1974), 52, 55.

[18] Melvin Sturm, phone interview with author, 4 October 1998; Esther Sturm Baloff, interview with Barbara Winick Bernstein and Marilyn Jacob Shore, 20 May 1985, for the Knoxville Jewish Community Archives Project, Knoxville Jewish Federation, Knoxville, Tennessee.

[19] *McDowell Recorder*, "Another 'Colonel'," January 9, 1914, and "'Colonel' Lopinsky," November 28, 1913. It is unknown when and how Ginsburg became a Kentucky colonel, but newspaper articles frequently referred to him that way.

[20] Ron Lane, and Ted Schempf, *Sewell: A New River Community* (Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1985); Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963), 344-345. Sam Weinstein's son David, in an oral history, expressed strong disapproval of the Ginsburg family for their dedication to what he saw as less-than-

respectable pursuits. He was at pains to make clear that the Weinsteins were not friendly with the Ginsburgs. David Weinstein, interview with Ann Matheny, 26 July 1990, Middlesboro, Ky. (transcript, Middlesboro Public Library).

[21] *Fayette Journal*, April 11, July 11, and October 17, 1901; Lane, and Schempf, *Sewell: A New River Community*; bankruptcy notices, *McDowell Recorder*, 1911-1922.

[22] Goldie Scott Jaffe, phone interview with author, 30 April 2000.

[23] Isadore Scott, phone interview with author, 14 December 1997; Irving Alexander, "Wilcoe: People of a Coal Town," *Goldenseal* 16 (Spring 1990): 28-35; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1910, 1920.

[24] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1101-1102; *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1916-1948; *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1904, 1910 (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co.); McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1920; Koslow interview; "Northfork-Clark is 1200 Town."

[25] Gail Bank, phone interview with author, 28 September and 4 October 1998; "Flag Raising"; *McDowell Recorder*, August 18, 1911 and September 29, 1911. Harry Bank was an incorporator (one of five) and director of Kimball's First National Bank (*McDowell Recorder*, September 26, 1919). Isadore Tobin's business went bankrupt after a fire; years later he worked as a coal miner in Logan County. It is unknown what happened to the utility franchise (McDowell County Petition for Naturalization Book 1, McDowell County Courthouse, Welch, W.Va.; *McDowell Recorder*, December 24, 1915).

[26] "Schoolmarm Acquitted," January 12, and "Brings Them In: Squire Midelburg's Busy and Exciting Saturday," October 5, 1905, *Fayette Journal*. A profile in *Progressive West Virginians* lists Midleburg as a "32nd degree Mason and a member of the Jewish church." He served eight years as justice of the peace and was elected to the House of Delegates from Fayette County. Ironically, the former saloonist was "author of the bill prohibiting the drinking of intoxicating liquors on trains." After moving to Charleston in the 1910s, he served on the Charleston City Council (including a stint as council president) and as a state legislator from Kanawha County in the 1920s. (Wheeling: *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 1923), 123.

[27] Keystone City Hall plaque, Keystone, W.Va.; *McDowell Times*, January 23, 1914, March 6, 1914; *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1922, 1948, 1960; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 25, 75; Jake Shore versus Keystone, McDowell County Circuit Court records, 1910-1911; Gail Bank interview.

[28] "Fire! Destroys Three Buildings," *McDowell Times*, July 21, 1916; Virginia Strange Kiser, *Memories of Pocahontas* (Bluefield, W.Va.: H. E. Kiser Jr., 1998), 9. Some of the more descriptive articles run by the *McDowell Times* on Keystone fires: September 26, 1913; June 26, 1914; December 31, 1915; December 8, 1916; April 20, 1917; May 4, 1917; January 11, 1918. Western Jews had a similar presence in volunteer fire departments. See Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," 68; Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 65.

[29] "Banner Business Year in Keystone," December 26, 1913; August 18, 1916; "Keystone: A Few Things About It and a Few Men," August 25, 1916; "New Walkway on Bridge," September 27, 1918; all *McDowell Times*.

[30] Mary Beth Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky" and "The Boundaries of Class in Preindustrial Appalachia." See also Maggard, "From Farmers to Miners," 33-42.

[31] Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 41; *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1940, 1944, 1948; *Bell County, Kentucky, History* (Paducah: Bell County Historical Society, 1994), 261; "Irvin Gergely" obituary, *Lexington Herald-Leader*, May 27, 2000.

[32] Rudy Eiland, "The Retail Merchant," *Centennial Program, City of Logan, West Virginia, 1852-1952* (Logan Centennial Association, 1952) (first quote); Edward Eiland, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 19 May 1998; Manuel Pickus, interview with Maryanne Reed, Charleston, W.Va., 8 August, 1996 (second quote); *McDowell Recorder*, July 15, 1921 (third quote); Thomas C. Hatcher, et al., *The Heritage of McDowell County, West Virginia, 1858-1995* (War, W.Va.: McDowell County Historical Society, 1995), 27 (fourth quote); Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 232.

[33] Marilou S. Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee," 1963 (unpublished manuscript, Williamson Public Library, Williamson, W.Va.), 52-54, 97.

[34] *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1944, 1948; Eiland 1998 interview; Manuel Pickus, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 18 May 1998; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 50-55, 68 (quote); Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough." See chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of these issues.

[35] "Splendid Meeting," *McDowell Recorder*, January 20, 1922, p. 2.

[36] Ibid.

[37] *The Pinnacle* (Middlesboro, Ky.), February 12, 1917.

[38] Forester, *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties*, 233-234. As Ronald L. Lewis points out in his study of the region's timber boom, reliance on liquor and related activities as a staple of the economy gave rise to an atmosphere of corruption, with payoffs to local officials to overlook unlicensed saloons, gambling parlors, etc., not uncommon. See *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 204. After liquor became illegal the need for the complicity of the authorities became even more necessary, which partly explains why places such as Middlesboro and Keystone developed long-lasting reputations for political corruption.

[39] Although this section focuses on Keystone, Pocahontas, and Middlesboro, smaller coalfield towns also saw their share of boomtown-type activities. In "Cleaning Up Kimball," the *McDowell Recorder* noted that Kimball too had its "noxious evils" (referring to bootlegging), as did other McDowell County towns (April 13, 1917). Homer Hickam's memoir *October Sky* comments on the rough reputation of War in previous decades (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1999), 27. Jews in these towns were an active part of the scene. In fact, most of the Jews who sought McDowell County liquor licenses in 1913 lived not in Keystone but in smaller towns such as Kimball, Northfork, Wilcoe, and Davy ("Notice of Application for Liquor Licenses," *McDowell Times*, May 9, 1913).

[40] Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism: Poland and Its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 143-144, 152. See also "Wine and Liquor Trade," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 16 (New York: Macmillan 1971), 541-546.

In contrast to Europe, claims the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, "in the U.S. few Jews were tavern keepers" (p. 546). Yet coalfield Jews were hardly unique in continuing to pursue this trade in America; several studies mention saloon keeping as one of the economic activities that enabled immigrant Jews to get their start in

their new surroundings. See Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 160-161, 177; Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 35; Mark Bauman, "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: The German Jews from the Civil War through the Progressive Era," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82 (Fall 1998): 550-551; Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town," 65.

[41] The number of Jewish saloon owners varied greatly from place to place. In Fayette County, only one out of sixty-five licenses granted at a 1906 court session went to a Jewish businessman, Eugene Lopinsky ("Dry Spots Abound," *Fayette Journal*, April 5, 1906). On the other hand, in 1913, eleven of forty-two liquor licenses granted at a McDowell County court session went to Jews, including three of the thirteen licenses granted in Keystone ("Notice of Application for Liquor Licenses").

[42] Sylvan and Elaine Bank, phone interview with author, 4 March 1998; Kenneth Bank, interview with author, Baltimore, 6 November 1998; Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1969); Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 52 (quote).

[43] "Pay Day Pleasantries. Two Men Wounded and One in Jail at Keystone," *Bluefield Telegraph*, February 2, 1901, p. 4; Nancy Brant, phone interview with author, October 1998; *Middlesboro News*, August 29, 1903.

[44] Edna Moore Drosick, interview with author, Pocahontas, Va., 26 April 1998.

[45] Hannah Sprecher, "Let Them Drink and Forget Poverty: Orthodox Rabbis' Reactions to Prohibition," *American Jewish Archives* 43 (1991): 135-179 (quote, 137); Bauman, "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta," 550-551; "Asceticism," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 3, 677-680.

[46] Kiser, *Memories of Pocahontas*; Ken Bank, Drosick, Scott interviews. *McDowell Times*: "Three Great Days," May 15, 1914; "Terrible Drought in West Virginia," July 3, 1914; "Whoopee," June 4, 1915. Immigrants in Harlan County "tried to avoid Prohibition completely" and on one occasion a large mob threatened revenue agents at Lynch. Doug Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County, 1910-1930," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 86, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 119-141 (quote, 129).

[47] "Dry Spots Abound"; Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia*, 76.

[48] "Middlesboro History" column, June 16 and September 28, 1990. According to local "wet" legend, "many" of the Pocahontas temperance marchers "were closet drinkers" (Drosick interview).

[49] "Middlesboro History" column, November 21 and 23, 1990; *West Virginians of 1934-1935* (Wheeling: *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 1935), 67.

[50] "They Got What They Asked For," *McDowell Times*, March 20, 1914; Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 203-208. It wasn't just the citizens of Keystone who tolerated Cinder Bottom: one-time West Virginia attorney general Howard B. Lee reported that the area's coal operators insisted on the maintenance of the vice district as part of their strategy to attract labor to the area. In *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, he writes of being given a tour of Cinder Bottom by Keystone's police chief in 1911.

[51] *McDowell Times* articles: "Are They Sincere?," June 11, 1915; "What Value Are They To Society?," February 2, 1917; "Clean Up the Streets of Keystone, Move Those Barrels, Put Up Your Hogs, Law Violated Every Day, Why?," August 24, 1917.

"Lid Put on Cinder Bottom" (February 9, 1917) describes another attempt to tidy up the red light district. New regulations forbade the playing of pianos from midnight Saturday until six a.m. Monday, and men were not to be seen entering or leaving Cinder Bottom during those hours. "It is also ordered that the 'Ladies' must not be seen too frequently on porches nor with their heads too conspicuously out of windows," says the article, adding, solicitously, that "these orders, we understand, and have been told, are only for the purpose and to the end that the women and men in Cinder Bottom may become a little more particular, cautious, and common-sense like and in no way means to inflict a hardship or inconvenience on those who by choice and circumstances live there."

[52] Ken Bank interview; Anonymous ("A Virginia Lad"), *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day, or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia* (n.p.: 1912), West Virginia and Regional History Collection (West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.); *McDowell Recorder*, May 11, 1917, and January 20, 1922. The *Sodom and Gomorrah* booklet evidently achieved a fairly wide distribution; one *McDowell Recorder* article mentions that it was sold on N&W trains ("Hung Jury in Calhoun Case," February 5, 1915).

[53] McDowell County Criminal Court records, 1894-1918; Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*. During his tour of Cinder Bottom Howard Lee asked the police chief, "Who owns these dives?" The reply: "That is a matter that is never discussed." *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 205.

[54] Anonymous, *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day*; "Mamie Flood Is Convicted," *McDowell Times,* November 26, 1915; "Lucy Cooper Is Convicted," *McDowell Times*, December 3, 1915 (quote); State of West Virginia vs. Mamie Flood, 1915, McDowell County Criminal Court records; Manuscript Census, McDowell County, 1920; Brant interview.

[55] Criminal Court records, McDowell and Fayette Counties, 1870s to 1920s.

[56] Criminal Court records, McDowell and Fayette Counties. "Middlesboro History" column, December 5 and December 15, 1990. Non-Jewish saloonists (black, native white, and immigrant) also appeared regularly to pay fines for similar infractions, including members of the leading families in the coalfields.

Some sidelights on Jewish-gentile interaction and the liquor issue: On one occasion in 1880, Midleburg's accuser was none other than the straitlaced William D. Thurmond, founder of the town of Thurmond, who testified against him before a grand jury and also, somehow, served as foreman at the trial. Conversely, when Goodfriend was president of the Middlesboro Distilling Company, his vice-president was H. P. Ball, whose family engaged in the "Colson-Ball feud" of 1921 to 1924. The distantly-related Balls and Colsons were prominent Middlesboro families with extensive business interests in the town, according to articles in several Middlesboro newspapers.

[57] McDowell County Criminal Court records; Fayette County Criminal Court records.

[58] Quoted in Simon, "The South African Jewish Experience," 76; McDowell, Fayette, Mingo County Circuit Court records; *West Virginia Supreme Court Reports*, various years; Katzen vs. Shore, 1902, and Zaltzman vs. Totz, et al., 1909, McDowell County Circuit Court records.

[59] Zaltzman vs. Totz, et al., 1909, McDowell County Circuit Court records.

[60] Very few Jews in county seat towns were brought to court over Sunday law violations, however. A possible explanation is that in these towns, which were more middle class and less dominated by single males than other independent towns, shopping on a Sunday was not considered respectable. Or the reason

could simply be demographic: Jews did not move to the county seats in significant numbers until the mid 1910s, by which point Sunday law enforcement had tapered off. Criminal Court records, McDowell and Fayette Counties; *West Virginia Code, 1923* (Charleston: Federal Publishing Co., 1923).

[61] Through the nineteenth century, Jews in many states challenged Sunday laws on constitutional grounds, with mixed results. However, in *Jews in the California Gold Rush*, Robert Levinson asserts that Jewish civic leaders actually supported Sunday laws, as part of their orientation in favor of policies that promoted "civilizing tendencies" in the Wild West (72). West Virginia's Sunday law remained in the state code late into the twentieth century, although the list of exemptions had grown quite long. After large discount stores began appearing in the state in the post-World War II era, the law became virtually unenforceable. Eiland 1998 interview. Criminal Court records, McDowell and Fayette Counties; *West Virginia Code, 1923*; Albert M. Friedenberg, "The Jews and the American Sunday Laws," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 11 (1903): 101-115.

[62] On World War I as a turning point in the coalfields, see Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 52.

[63] "Ashes, Memories Have Settled on Keystone's Cinder Bottom," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 26 May, 1975; "Middlesboro History" column, August 7, November 21, November 23, 1990; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 29; Gail Bank, Weinstein interviews; "Simple Jewish Rites for Zuta Funeral Today" and "Blond Man Is Being Sought in Zuta Case," *Middlesboro Daily News*, August 7, 1930. Intermittent "dry" periods did not stop the Ginsburgs from continuing their involvement in tavern owning. In 1949, local businesses fined on charges of trafficking in alcoholic beverages in a dry county and operating slot machines included their Colonel's Bar and Grill ("Middlesboro History" column, February 3, 1990).

[64] Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 25; McDowell County Petition for Naturalization Book 2, p. 6; *McDowell Recorder*, "Katzen Lands Appointment," April 9, 1915; "Lon Eubanks Shot in Raid on Speakeasy," September 3, 1915; "Officers Capture Liquor," May 18, 1917; "Prohibition Sleuths Make Many Hauls," July 13, 1917. Keystone's *McDowell Times* also printed favorable stories about Katzen and Gay, but tended to compliment them on their restraint rather than their daring deeds. The *Times* took a less-than-enthusiastic tone when it came to prohibition enforcement, opting often for glib humor. It stated of one Katzen and Gay episode, "There was weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth while the unclaimed booze was being supplied to the fish in the Elkhorn." *McDowell Times*, "Captured!," July 7, 1916; "Prohibition Officers Raid in Keystone," June 30, 1916; "Notice to Business Men," May 4, 1917.

[65] "Unfortunate Homicide," October 6, 1916, "Katzen Trial," December 15, 1916, and "Katzen Found Not Guilty," December 22, 1916, all *McDowell Recorder*; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 25; Emanuel Katzen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Princeton, W.Va., 30 May 1996; Temple Emanuel founders' plaque, McDowell County Public Library.

[66] Koslow, Baloff, Ken Bank, Sylvan Bank, Scott, Pickus 1998 interviews; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 58; Sidney Fink, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 12 October 1996. Like other small towns, there were advantages and disadvantages to living in a place where, as Milton Koslow put it, "Everyone knew everyone else's business." He recalled that Northfork's longtime telephone operator kept tabs on everybody in town; if his mother tried to phone a friend, she might be informed, "I'm sorry Mrs. Koslow, but Mrs. Schwartz went downtown." When he called home from Europe on V-E Day, the operator unabashedly listened to the entire conversation.

On coalfield ethnic groups socializing primarily within their own group, see Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County; Margaret Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia: Catholics in the Coal Camps, 1900-1940," *Appalachian Heritage* 6 (1978): 43-56.

[67] Mary Marsh Ofsa, phone interview with author, 26 March 1999; Drosick interview; Christine Carr McGuire, phone interview with author, November 1998.

[68] Scott, Ken Bank interviews.

[69] Ofsa interview; "Irvin Gergely"; Kiser, *Memories of Pocahontas*, 9; "Masonic Officers Entertained," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 5, 1916; 1920 Manuscript Census, Tazewell County. Of course, the coalfield Jewish population did not consist entirely of beloved characters. One non-Jewish interviewee recalled a Jewish family she delicately described as "not very nice people," either in their business or personal lives. They may have been the "only bad apple family" among the Jews in her town, but certainly they had their counterparts in other coalfield towns.

[70] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 46; Isadore Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; Eiland 1998, McGuire interviews; Ira Sopher, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996. While some second generation Jews described this portion of the older generation somewhat disapprovingly as "clannish," others preferred to think of their elders as simply more "close-knit" than their own generation. This issue will be explored further in chapter 6.

[71] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 46; Jean Abrams Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; Reva Totz Hecker, interview with author, Baltimore, 5 November 1998; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 67-69.

[72] Jean Abrams Wein, Baloff, Jaffe interviews; Sam and Harvey Weiner, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 8 November 1996. In *The Jew Store*, Stella Suberman (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998) offers an eloquent description of her mother's reservations about leaving family and Jewish community behind to move to western Tennessee, and her reactions to the townspeople on first arriving. Unlike her father, Suberman's mother never did become completely at home.

[73] One woman, reflecting on her life in Williamson, offered this somewhat equivocal statement in the early 1970s: "The town has been good to us. My husband loves his work and that is why we live here. The store has grown tremendously. My husband likes the people and the challenge. He's happy with what he's doing and I'm happy with what I'm doing. One has to find peace in one's home." David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 96. Even women who grew up in the region had their reservations: as Marilou Schwachter Sniderman writes about her mother, born in nearby Kentucky, "Williamson has never been the paradise for her that it has represented to Dad." *Diamond in the Rough*, 98.

[74] Baloff, Koslow interviews; *McDowell Recorder*, September 3 and 24, 1920; *West Virginia Blue Book*, 1924, 1928, 1933.

[75] Scott, Ken Bank, Koslow, Pickus 1998, Jaffe interviews.

[76] Harry Berman, interview with John C. Hennen Jr., Williamson, W.Va., 15 and 28 June 1989 (transcript, Matewan Oral History Project. Matewan Development Center, Matewan, W.Va.), 6, 27, 31.

[77] Scott, Ken Bank, Koslow, Pickus 1998, Jaffe, Jean Abrams Wein interviews.

[78] "Miss Klein Entertains," April 21, 1922; "Mr. And Mrs. Herzbrun Celebrate 35th Anniversary," December 5, 1919; "Wagner-Totz Wedding a Brilliant Affair," April 7, 1922; "Goodman-Lopinsky," February 12, 1915; "Lipman-Leventhal," January 8, 1915; all *McDowell Recorder*.

[79] *Fayette Journal*, August 8, 1901; *McDowell Recorder*, January 26, 1912; August 22, 1913; December 12, 1919; *Middlesboro News*, November 25, 1905.

[80]Alexander, "Wilcoe: People of a Coal Town," 29; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 44-45.

[81] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 44-46; "Dance Was Most Enjoyable Affair," *McDowell Recorder*, May 12, 1911; "Home of Mrs. I. C. Herndon Scene of Delightful Party," *McDowell Recorder* August 18, 1916.

[82] Isadore Wein, Pickus 1998 interviews; Lou Mankoff, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., March 1996; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 50, 55; Ivan Albert, interview with author, Williamson, W.Va., 8 November 1996.

[83] *Middlesboro News*, *McDowell Recorder*, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, *Fayette Journal*, *Williamson Daily News*; Weiner, Eiland 1998, Pickus 1998, Katzen, McGuire interviews; *Bell County, Kentucky, History*; Marino, *Welch and its People*; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936" (Hebrew Union College Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati); David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town."

[84] "Reminiscences of Early Days, Pocahontas Masonic Lodge," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, March 6, 1924; S. D. Stokes Papers, Box 1, West Virginia and Regional History Collection; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 338; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 26; Frank Anthony Fear, "The Quest for Saliency: Patterns of Jewish Communal Organization in Three Appalachian Small Towns" (M.A. thesis, West Virginia University, 1972), 116-117.

[85] Marino, *Welch and Its People*; Hatcher, et al., *Heritage of McDowell County*; Weiner interview; *McDowell Recorder*, July 13 and August 10, 1917; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[86] Bertie Rodgin Cohen, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 6 March 2000; Ken Bank interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 497; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 61, 95-96.

[87] Hecker interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Koslow interview; *McDowell Recorder*, May 29, 1914; October 13, 1922.

[88] Lewis Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971). *McDowell Recorder*, *Fayette Journal*, *Middlesboro News*, *Harlan Enterprise*; Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, interview with author, Parkersburg, W.Va., 18 December 1997; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 47-49, 78; Theatrical Program, Roy H. Keadle Scrapbook (West Virginia and Regional History Collection).

[89] Williamson High School Alumni Program, Keadle Scrapbook; Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 48; *McDowell Recorder*, December 31, 1920 and March 4, 1921; "Middlesboro History" column, November 30, 1990; Logan congregation records (American Jewish Archives); Abraham I. Shinedling and Manuel Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community* (Beckley, W.Va.: Biggs-Johnston-Withrow, 1955).

[90] Hatcher, et al., *Heritage of McDowell County*, 27; Evans, *The Provincials*, 93; William Toll, "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920," *American Jewish Archives* 41 (1989): 7-26; Leonard Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81.

[91] *McDowell Recorder*, December 10, 1915; January 7, 1916; January 5, 1917; February 9, 1917; May 8, 1917; February 24, 1911; March 7, 1911. *Welch Daily News*, October 24, 1933; "Fine Program Rendered," *Mingo Republican*, February 22, 1923.

[92] Congregational, Sisterhood, B'nai B'rith records for congregations in Welch, Williamson, Logan, and Harlan (American Jewish Archives); Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Pickus 1998 interview.

[93] Minutes, Logan B'nai B'rith chapter, January 30, 1940; Minutes, Welch B'nai B'rith chapter, October 19 and November 2, 1944, July 10, 1945. Leon Miller spoke about "The American Negro, his Traits and Problems." The group also heard Father Thomas Rafferty speak on "Plans for a Better World."

[94] Pickus 1998 interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 317-318; Abraham I. Shinedling Collection (American Jewish Archives).

[95] Marino, *Welch and Its People*, 41; Williamson Congregation B'nai Israel minutes; letter from James Zambus, dean of Bluefield College, to Abraham Shinedling, 22 October 1956, Shinedling Collection.

[96] "Jewish Relief Fund Results," *McDowell Recorder*, January 28, 1916; *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 2 and May 4, 1917; "Relief Committee," *McDowell Recorder*, October 25, 1918; "Jewish Congregation Organized," *McDowell Recorder*, 4-26-18; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 91; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[97] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 34-35.

[98] Elaine Bank interview.

[99] Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," 292.

[100] Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 60-72, 22, 7.

[101] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 186-213; Stern, "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town"; Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'," 89-90. Eureka's 1870 Purim Ball was described by the local newspaper as "An Event Never Equaled in the Social History of Eureka." Two non-Jewish women won prizes for best costume (Stern, 62).

[102] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 186-208.

[103] Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*; Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'"; Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*; Mark H. Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 34; Jack E. Davis, "Jews, White Gentiles, and Caste Society in Natchez," paper delivered at the "Jewish Experience in the Southern Americas" Conference, Tulane University, New Orleans, April 8, 2000. For a worldwide perspective, see Gilman and Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier*.

[104] Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*; Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'"; Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*; Hundert, "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland"; Louis Schmier, "Jews and Gentiles in a South Georgia Town," in *Jews of the*

South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society, ed. Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press), 9-10.

[105] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Wendy Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001); Edward Cohen, *The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*; Eli Evans, *The Provincials*.

[106] A hard-to-determine number of coalfield Jews, of both German and East European origin, assimilated completely into coalfield society. These people either stopped identifying as Jewish, chose not to affiliate with the Jewish community, or (in the case of some intermarried Jews) did not raise their children as Jews. The likelihood of one or more of these things occurring was far higher among the few German Jewish families in the region than among the Eastern Europeans.

[107] Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 56; Schmier, "Jews and Gentiles in a South Georgia Town," 9; Livingston, introductory essay, *Jews of the American West*, 22.

[108] Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'"; Norton B. Stern, "The Major Role of Polish Jews in the Pioneer West," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* (July 1976): 326-344. One other factor must be taken into account: immigrants who choose to migrate to frontiers are likely to be, as Levinson puts it, "the most adventurous of their people," less bound by restrictions or tradition than others and more likely to quickly adopt local ways (*Jews in the California Gold Rush*, 87). This would apply just as much to East European Jews as to German Jews.

[109] Mark K. Bauman and Bobbie Malone, "Directions in Southern Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (September 1997): 192; Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, "Taking Exception with Exceptionalism: The Emergence and Transformation of Historical Studies of Appalachia," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 1-24.

Chapter 5

Coalfield Jewish Communities

One day late in 1913, several women gathered at the home of Gertrude (Mrs. Jake) Levine to form the Jewish Ladies Guild, the first Jewish organization in Williamson, West Virginia. A terse note in the minutes of the meeting explained, "Purpose, Jewish charity." The women came together to aid the "numerous" Jewish transients passing through town, who "were a perplexing burden indeed to us individually," communal leader Leah Shein later observed. In addition to charity, the Guild was started for "social reasons," fellow organizer Ida Bank recalled in a 1926 speech.[1]

It is unclear just what she meant by that: certainly the new group offered the women opportunities to socialize, but soon they embarked on a much more ambitious agenda. In 1916 they started a Sabbath school for the town's five Jewish children, Bank related, "and I was their teacher, with no experience in this work, with no instructions, only with the will and ambition to do something for the children along religious lines and to help them on the path to Judaism." The women next turned their attention to organizing communal events and religious services, bringing in a visiting rabbi for the high holidays. Shortly thereafter, the Williamson congregation was founded. Their Ladies Guild transformed into a Sisterhood, the women then began laying the groundwork for building a synagogue by starting a Temple fund.[2]

Ida Bank may not have had experience as a religious teacher, but she did have the benefit of an Orthodox Jewish upbringing in Keystone, West Virginia, where her father Jake Shore and father-in-law Wolf Bank were pioneer merchants. When she and her husband Hyman came to Williamson as a young couple around 1911, the town's tiny Jewish contingent could not

compare to Keystone's thriving Jewish community, which boasted a synagogue and full-time rabbi. But more than just small numbers hindered communal efforts in Williamson: according to Bank, the town's Jewish families were so "divided by petty business jealousies" that she considered the first Ladies Guild meeting to be a significant achievement. A former student rabbi later recalled that religious differences also caused dissension in the young congregation. Yet the forces pulling Williamson Jews together proved stronger than those keeping them apart. At the time Bank made her remarks at the annual Sisterhood-led Sabbath service in 1926, completion of their synagogue was still two years away, but she could look back with satisfaction on a successful endeavor, led largely by women, to forge a close-knit and active Jewish community.[3]

Bank's speech not only captured the early history of Williamson's B'nai Israel congregation, it provides a pretty decent synopsis of the creation of small Jewish congregations throughout America. The progression from charitable activity to religious education to congregational development and synagogue-building was a common one. Moreover, women played a critical leadership role in many Jewish communities, though their efforts typically occurred behind the scenes. And wherever the Jewish population was "too small to factionalize" into multiple congregations, community members faced the need to overcome conflicts resulting from business competition and religious disagreements. Coalfield Jewish communities reflected the American Jewish experience in other ways, as well: above all, by sharing in what historian Gerald Sorin has termed "the great American balancing act—the need for acculturation on the one side and the desire to retain something of a Jewish world on the other."[4]

Sixty years after the meeting in Gertrude Levine's living room, rabbinical student Jerome Paul David came to Williamson to study "what it means to be Jewish in a small town." By the early 1970s the community had shrunk to less than one hundred people (from a height of around

two hundred) and was in evident decline. But its members, "home-grown" descendants of the original Jewish families and "imports" who had arrived in the immediate post-World War II boom years, remained committed to their congregation. Concluded David, "The Jews of Williamson are heirs of diversified and rich backgrounds, but they have one main goal in common; to provide for the well-being of their children and to transmit a love of Judaism to them." This goal—actually two, economic and spiritual, both seen in the context of transmission to the next generation—also marks Williamson Jews as typical. Historian Jacob Rader Marcus identifies economic well-being and "the obligation to be a Jew," in that order, as the top two priorities of Jewish immigrants, although he also adds a third: the "fervent wish to become an American," to acculturate and participate in American society. This third priority, though David did not include it as a primary goal, provided the ever-present context for his study, which delved deeply into issues of assimilation and Jewish-gentile relations.[5]

This chapter will examine how these three motivating forces interacted to shape the character of Jewish coalfield communities. At times they reinforced each other and at other times they clashed. Kinship ties and the business networks that helped Jews advance economically provided a natural basis for Jewish communities, but the drive to succeed also got in the way of communal responsibility, not to mention harmony. The urge to assimilate caused conflicts over Jewish belief and practice (both within individuals and within congregations), but also provided an impetus to organize communal structures that fit into the framework of coalfield society and conferred respectability on the Jewish minority. By looking at how congregation members integrated these various considerations into the fabric of their communities, the layers of complexity surrounding the "balancing act" begin to emerge.

Historians and sociologists have observed that while all American Jews dealt with similar

issues, Jews in small towns faced a distinctly different situation from Jews in large cities. The pressure to assimilate was greater, the resources available for constructing community were fewer, access to the cultural trappings of Jewish life was greatly limited. On the other hand, these very challenges sometimes called forth a response that more than made up for problems they posed. Delegates to a 1973 national conference of small town Jews expressed the view that "contrary to large city opinion, . . . the small community offers a richer Jewish life; there is a distinct desire to retain identity which in larger cities is too often lost because it is taken for granted." This would certainly seem to be the case in Williamson. David's study came out the year after the conference and echoed its language closely. He found his subjects to be "concerned and enthusiastic Jews who do not take their Judaism for granted" and asserted, "Although limited with regard to the extent of Jewish exposure, one senses that there is a depth of Jewish commitment which is more genuine and sincere than can be found . . . in larger Jewish centers."[6]

So coalfield Jewish communities resonated the concerns and realities of American Jewry as a whole, and of small town Jewry even more so. But broad similarities can serve to obscure the varieties of experience that exist within them. Even within the region, Jewish congregations exhibited three distinct patterns of growth. Yes, Jewish immigrants "Americanized"—but to specific coalfield environments that played a role in how that process would proceed. The ways these small congregations both reflected and departed from the basic contours of American Jewish life illuminate issues of Jewish identity, continuity, and community. Their story also adds to the picture of ethnic and religious diversity in Central Appalachia by showing how one small minority maintained its identity and heritage while participating in the larger society around it. This chapter will explore the communal and religious life of coalfield Jews. It will examine how they adapted their cultural traditions to their new homes, how they created and maintained

communal organizations, and how they coped with the internal and external tensions surrounding issues of religion and cultural identity.

Old Country Roots and Three Patterns of Growth

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe came from a background "wholly pervaded by Jewishness," where daily life had been for centuries marked by religious ritual and where Jewish schools, mutual aid societies, rabbinical courts, and other forms of self-government regulated social interaction. Imperatives such as prayer and study (for men), keeping a Jewish home (for women), and communal responsibility (primarily a male obligation) set the standards for behavior. Even as this society modernized, the new expressions that developed remained grounded in the context of Jewish tradition, resulting in a hybrid culture, a mixture of old and new that came to be known as *Yiddishkeit*. Historians agree that despite the inroads made by secularism and modernity in the nineteenth century, "traditional patterns and organizations remained strong" among East European Jewry up until the very end. "Social and religious issues" continued to be "intertwined," especially in the shtetls, where most Jewish immigrants to the coalfields originated. [7]

The decision to emigrate was, in part, a decision to leave this insular world behind. And immigrants willing to locate in the vast non-Jewish interior of America, rather than in the Yiddish neighborhoods of New York and other cities, must have been even more prepared than others to give up the all-encompassing Jewish environment in which they had been raised. But this does not mean they contemplated abandoning an identity, religion, and culture so deeply ingrained. Most were internally motivated to retain their Jewishness and find ways to express it. Moreover, except for the first Jewish pioneers to arrive in an area, the others who joined them

through chain migration did not necessarily make the same kind of choice to leave their ethnic enclaves to settle in "virgin territory": they came because they were sent for, or because their trailblazing relatives offered them a sure job. This includes most of the women as well as many male relatives of original Jewish settlers. These people tended to be more traditionally oriented than the pioneers and made a significant contribution to Jewish communities in small towns throughout America. The recurrent arrival of newcomers—especially those who came straight from Europe to join their U.S. relatives—reinforced the Jewish character of these communities as they developed, counteracting the assimilatory influences that engaged longer-established residents. In the mid 1920s national immigration restriction laws put a halt to direct infusions from the old country. This was a turning point; in the years to follow, the communities would have to rely on various other means to maintain their identity.[8]

Jews in the southern coalfields went to great lengths to transplant their old culture while adapting it to their new homes. Though efforts took place on many fronts (in the home, in the workplace, through informal socializing), the key to cultural survival was the creation of the local congregation, which offered a structure within which Jews could practice their religion, transmit their heritage to their children, and organize the rituals and customs that connected them to their tradition. Sociologists note that "the core of ethnic resources available in the small town Jewish community emerges around the synagogue." Between 1892 and 1931, coalfield Jews founded nine congregations which each served as a local center and stimulus for Jewish life. Seven congregations built their own synagogues while the other two maintained rented quarters which provided a semi-permanent home for their activities (see Table 4).[9]

According to sociologist Marshall Sklare, the institution of the synagogue is uniquely suited to meet the challenges faced by small town communities. "The synagogue is focused on Jewish

Table 4
Jewish Congregations in the Central Appalachian Coalfields

Town	Name of Congregation / Primary Affiliation	Dates of Operation	Year Synagogue Built or Acquired
Pocahontas, Va.	Ahavath Chesed Orthodox	1890s – 1930s*	1912
Keystone, W. Va.	B'nai Israel Orthodox	1890s – 1940s	1904
Middlesboro, Ky.	Temple of Zion Orthodox / Conservative	1900s – 1930s*	No synagogue
Bluefield, W. Va.**	Ahavath Sholom Reform	1900s – present	1907 (second and current synagogue built, 1949)
Kimball, W. Va.	Beth Jacob Orthodox	1910s – 1930s*	1914
Welch, W. Va.	Congregation Emanuel Reform	1910s – 1980s	1922-1924
Williamson, W. Va.	B'nai Israel Reform	1910s – present	1928
Logan, W. Va.	B'nai El Reform	1910s – 1980s	1948
Beckley, W. Va.	Beth El Reform	1920s - present	1935
Harlan, Ky.	B'nai Sholom Reform / Conservative	1930s – 1970s	No synagogue

* Precise end date unknown / ** Bluefield, as regional center, included for comparative purposes.

survival," he asserts. Rather than being restricted to a narrow religious role, it can accommodate broader issues relating to communal persistence—ultimately for religious reasons, because "in Judaism, the preservation of the Jewish people as a group is an act of religious significance." Moreover, the synagogue has the flexibility necessary to adapt to local Jewish survival needs. Explains Sklare, "Since the typical American Jewish congregation is formed by local initiative rather than by the authority of a central body, every synagogue is free to determine its own program and ritual." So from similar old country roots, different forms of Jewish practice can emerge, based on local needs and conditions.[10]

Varying conditions within the coalfields led local congregations to pursue three alternative

paths to communal survival. Jews in the independent towns of Pocahontas, Virginia, and Keystone and Kimball, West Virginia, followed one model while the county seat towns of Welch, Williamson, Logan, and Beckley, West Virginia, followed another. In southeastern Kentucky where the Jewish population was smaller and more scattered, the congregations of Middlesboro and Harlan devised a third way. All the communities in these towns were shaped by economic and kinship ties, religious and cultural drives, and social considerations relating to the surrounding society, but these factors interacted in different ways depending largely on *where* and *when* Jewish settlement occurred. The following section sketches the coalfield congregations and the basic patterns of development they exhibited. Later sections will consider in more detail how economic, cultural, and social forces influenced their communities.

Jews settled in the region's boomtowns and emerging coal towns before the turn of the century. The very earliest came in the 1870s and early 1880s, but these German immigrants were too few to organize communally. The first stirrings of communal activity began with the arrival of East European Jews to the Pocahontas coalfield: the boomtowns of Pocahontas, Virginia, in the late 1880s and Keystone, in West Virginia's McDowell County, in the early 1890s. Jews in Pocahontas formed Congregation Ahavath Chesed in 1892 and Keystone Jews soon followed with Congregation B'nai Israel (its founding date is unknown, but the community had a rabbi by 1900). Remarkably, Jews in a third small Pocahontas coalfield town also formed a congregation early on. Kimball, sandwiched between Welch and Keystone and home of coalfield Jewish pioneer Harry Bank, hosted Congregation Beth Jacob probably by 1910 (when sources reveal that a rabbi lived in town). These congregations reached their prime in the first two decades of the twentieth century, when their Jewish populations were the largest in the region.[11]

Unlike the county seats, the three boomtown congregations started out "strictly Orthodox" and remained so throughout their existence. All built synagogues well before the county seat congregations: Keystone in 1903 or 1904, Kimball in 1914. Pocahontas Jews constructed a synagogue in 1912, but quite possibly this was not their first. The Pocahontas and Keystone synagogues each contained two requirements of traditional Judaism, a *mikvah* (ritual bath) and segregated seating for women (little is known about the Kimball synagogue).[12] The commitment of these Jews to Orthodoxy was expressed too in their burial arrangements. By 1890, the handful of German Jews of Pocahontas had reserved a small piece of land within the town's cemetery to bury their dead. To this day, the Jewish graves at this site are distinguished from the Christian graves that surround them only by the absence of crosses and their clustering together; none have Hebrew inscriptions. Only one person from an East European family was ever interred there: Harry Bank's one-year-old son Norris, who died in 1899. Probably the baby's death caught the community by surprise. By 1903, when seven-year-old Arnold Davis of Pocahontas died, his family could bury him in a newly-founded Orthodox cemetery located just outside the town of Pocahontas on the state line between Virginia and West Virginia. Until the late 1920s, Jews from both sides of the border were buried at this site, which became known locally as Hebrew Mountain. Many of the gravestones are inscribed entirely in Hebrew.[13]

Quite a lot about the development of the three congregations can be revealed by looking at their rabbis. At first, members held occasional prayer services in their homes and rented a hall for the high holidays. According to former Keystone resident Louis Zaltzman, "there were rabbis employed during the years before 1904 but they would not stay very long. . . . The leading Jewish men would conduct the services, [especially] one Kopel Hyman, who was formerly a *schochet* and a rabbi." So far Keystone's experience was typical. Traditional Jewish services

simply require a *minyan* of ten men and most immigrants were thoroughly familiar with the ritual. For more specialized tasks, such as the functions of a *schochet* (ritual slaughterer) or cantor, small congregations across the U.S., including all of those in the coalfields, often had in their midst one or two merchants with more extensive religious training. Many communities relied entirely on such men because they could not retain rabbis with any sort of permanency. Also, itinerant rabbis with somewhat dubious credentials, generally referred to as "reverends," circulated through small towns and provided temporary services. Their tenures (as Zaltzman notes) tended to be brief.[14]

But the Pocahontas, Kimball, and especially Keystone congregations managed to achieve a more stable condition. For much of their existence they had full-time rabbis who lived in town with their families. The rabbis also served as *schochtim*, enabling congregants to keep kosher with some consistency. In Keystone, the building of the synagogue marked a turning point: Rabbi Abraham Davidov arrived shortly after it opened and served for sixteen years. He was followed by Moses Borrow, who served from 1921 to around 1940. This record of longevity is striking compared to most small town Orthodox congregations. While rabbis in Pocahontas and Kimball did not show such staying power, they too exhibited some stability. The Pocahontas congregation supported at least five full-time rabbis from the 1890s to the 1920s in addition to those who simply passed through. In 1910, as many as three religious functionaries lived in town at the same time: the current and previous rabbis, and one J. Rappaport, a Lithuanian immigrant listed in the census as "minister, preaching." In Kimball, Rabbi Nathan Teich served from 1909 to at least 1915, while another rabbi officiated from at least 1919 to 1921.[15]

These rabbis brought their old country training, and no doubt their old country styles, with them. Ten of eleven rabbis identified in the three towns were immigrants (the origins of the

eleventh could not be determined). Davidov, Borrow, and Teich were all "fresh off the boat," each landing in the coalfields within a year of entering the U.S. The two Keystone rabbis were born in small Lithuanian towns, while Teich was probably from Poland. The extensive services provided by these three men suggest that they were fully ordained, as opposed to the vague qualifications of rabbis of a more itinerant nature. Two of the Pocahontas rabbis had diplomas from respected rabbinical authorities in Lithuania. Surely it must have reinforced the traditional tendencies of their coalfield congregants to have these Yiddish-speaking religious leaders and old country emissaries on hand to perform all the functions necessary to fulfill a small Jewish community's wide variety of religious needs, from leading prayer services to conducting weddings, funerals, and *brises* (circumcision rites), teaching Hebrew to the young people, and slaughtering animals in the ritually prescribed manner.[16]

This is not to say that the rabbis were relics of an older or bygone era. Davidov was thirty-six when he came to Keystone and Borrow, oldest of all the boomtown rabbis at the start of his tenure, was forty-eight. As for Teich, the year after he came to Kimball, the 1910 census shows the twenty-seven-year-old, non-English speaking, single rabbi boarding with twenty-five-year-old single butcher Sol Kaufman. His youth mirrored the youth of the Jewish population. In 1910 the average age of Jews in the three towns was only twenty-three. Kimball's forty-five Jews were especially young, with an average age of nineteen and heads of households averaging only twenty-seven. At thirty-eight, Harry Bank was the oldest Jewish person in town. The more established Keystone and Pocahontas communities were somewhat older: with household heads averaging forty years old, their adult populations had entered their prime. (The Keystone congregation, however, included a sizable younger contingent from the neighboring town of Northfork.) All the communities featured large families with lots of children: 40 percent of Jews

in Pocahontas, Keystone, Northfork, and Kimball in 1910 were under the age of seventeen.[17]

Given the youthfulness of the boomtown congregations during their heyday, it is not surprising that Jewish ritual was not their sole preoccupation. Religious observance provided the basis for a highly active social life shared by the three communities. Five years after his arrival, young Rabbi Teich, now married, gave an "impressive" address (in English, no doubt) at the dedication of Kimball's synagogue, an event the *McDowell Recorder* termed "one of the most elaborate affairs ever held among the Hebrews of the Coal Fields." Jews from throughout the Pocahontas coalfield gathered to celebrate their communal progress and enjoy each other's company. After the service, "a twelve-course supper was served," organized by a committee of ladies led by Harry Bank's wife Ida (not to be confused with Ida Bank of Williamson, her nephew's wife). Two women from nearby Keystone served on the committee, which hints at the close connections among Jews of the boomtowns. Similarly, at the dedication of the Pocahontas synagogue the previous year, the galleries overflowed with Jews from the surrounding area—probably the same people who attended the Kimball event. In Keystone, the intertwining of social and religious functions was exemplified by the congregation's Manhattan Social Club, which organized festive holiday celebrations. The club's 1911 Purim Ball was "a decided success," according to the *Recorder*, with the spacious hall "crowded to the limit."[18]

However, the vitality exhibited by the three Orthodox communities did not last much beyond the 1920s. As economic opportunities shifted to the county seats and the regional hub of Bluefield, all three lost members to the new coalfield centers. Although Keystone (along with Northfork) retained enough of a critical mass of Jews to keep its congregation going into the 1940s, its role in coalfield Jewish life greatly diminished with the rise of Jewish communities in Bluefield and Welch. Meanwhile, Jews who remained in Kimball and Pocahontas became

absorbed into the Welch and Bluefield congregations, respectively, because of their close proximity to those up-and-coming centers (though the more traditional among them may have transferred their attendance to Keystone). It is unknown exactly when the Kimball and Pocahontas congregations folded. Beth Jacob certainly did not survive the Depression. The Pocahontas congregation sold its synagogue building to the town's Women's Club around 1951, but probably ceased to function years earlier.[19]

Keystone's aging congregation limped through the 1940s but could no longer support a rabbi after Moses Borrow retired. According to chronicler of West Virginia Jewry Abraham Shinedling, the Reform rabbi in Bluefield or the Reform student rabbi in Welch would visit Keystone on Sunday evenings to teach religious school and conduct services. Nevertheless, Shinedling insists, the congregation "was at all times strictly Orthodox, and [its] services until the very end of its existence were conducted along strictly traditional, Orthodox lines." Apparently the Reform representatives attempted to accommodate the more traditional Keystone congregants on these occasions. This was not that unusual; Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary in Cincinnati, often made efforts to serve the needs of more traditional small town congregations by sending out student rabbis who were familiar with Orthodox ritual (and presumably not opposed to participating in services more traditional than their Reform training espoused). By 1945 Keystone's Jewish population had dwindled to the point where services were no longer conducted and the synagogue building was sold in 1952. Proceeds from the sale, as well as the Torah scrolls, were donated to a Jewish philanthropy for use in the establishment of a synagogue in Jerusalem.[20]

Two key factors helped the boomtown congregations sustain their commitment to traditional Judaism. First, the early date of their founding meant that an overwhelming number of

the adults were immigrants. Of course, this especially pertained to the first couple of decades, but continued to hold true as the years passed and their populations shrank. When members of the second generation began to reach adulthood in the 1910s, economic considerations caused most of them to move away. The database of Jewish coalfield residents (sampling all those in Virginia and West Virginia whose birthplace could be ascertained) shows that the percentage of Jews who were immigrants differed sharply between boomtowns and county seats. The vast majority of adults in the sample who lived in the boomtowns hailed from overseas: 72 percent in Pocahontas, 77 percent in Keystone-Northfork, and 92 percent in Kimball. In the county seats, the percentage ranged from 38 percent in Beckley to 60 percent in Logan, with Williamson at 47 percent and Welch at 51 percent. This covers a span from the 1880s to the 1950s. A more detailed analysis would certainly show change over time: all the communities started out heavily foreign-born and saw the percentage of American-born members grow as the years passed. Nevertheless, in the boomtowns immigrants remained predominant. They kept control of Jewish communal leadership and saw little reason to relinquish familiar rituals. One man born and raised in Keystone in the 1910s and 1920s later recalled that the synagogue was "too Orthodox for me" and his only choice was to stop attending; there were too few members of his generation in town to press for change.[21]

Second, the boomtown atmosphere that prevailed in Keystone, Pocahontas, and Kimball exerted less outside pressure on Jewish communities to conform to a certain standard of respectability. Not that there were no standards at all—Jews were part of the small middle class that attempted to promote stability and growth—but attitudes regarding propriety were definitely looser than in the county seats. Dwelling in the rough little towns were those Jews described in the previous chapter who squabbled vociferously among themselves, who started out as saloon

owners and often appeared in court in the early years for minor infractions of the law, who felt free to speak Yiddish in their daily lives. These people felt little urgency to "Americanize" their religious services. Their communal institutions, developed when their numbers were large and growing, continued to serve their purposes. And with full-time rabbis living in their communities, they never (until the very end) had to resort to student rabbis, and so never came under the influence of Hebrew Union College.

Of course, this does not mean that Jews in the boomtowns completely retained old country ways. Economic imperatives forced them to work on the Sabbath and make many of the other compromises that all small town American Jews had to make. They too were affected by their relative isolation from the larger Jewish world and they too were drawn into a new and dynamic society. They did indeed assimilate, but into a milieu that enabled them to keep up more of their traditions than Jews in other small town communities, including the coalfield county seats.

Timing accounts for much of the difference in congregational development between the boomtowns and the county seats. In 1910, when 374 Jews lived in Pocahontas, Keystone, Northfork, and Kimball, only seventy-two lived in the four county seat towns of Welch, Williamson, Logan, and Beckley. Ten years later the county seats had nearly caught up: their Jewish population was 229 and rising, while in the four boomtowns it had fallen to 257. Jews in three of the county seat towns began to organize in the 1910s. By that time the second generation—many American-born, others brought to the U.S. as small children—had begun to make its influence felt. Though immigrants played a critical role in all the county seat congregations, they shared communal leadership with people who had grown up in America, many right in the coalfields. The six women who attended the second meeting of Williamson's

Jewish Ladies Guild, for example, included only three who came from Europe as young adults. Of the other three, one was born on American soil. Ida Shore Bank and Leah Shein, quoted in the first paragraph of this chapter, both arrived in the U.S. by age three.[22]

While the social milieu in the boomtowns gave Jewish residents little incentive to alter their traditional tendencies, Jews in the county seats entered a society whose emerging middle class strove for respectability and acted to create a more hierarchical social structure. Although coalfield county seats could hardly be considered staid, social clubs and church groups set a tone that was more refined than in the neighboring coal towns. County seat Jews were (for the most part) eager to join in the middle class social scene and their neighbors were (for the most part) quite willing to accept them. And as noted in chapter 4, forming their own religious congregations, far from isolating Jews, helped them fit into a society where religion was all-important. County seat congregations therefore served a dual purpose, as they did throughout the South. As historian Leonard Rogoff states, "The congregation was the agency of Jewish solidarity and survival, but it also functioned as a Jewish church which integrated Jews into southern society as citizens and neighbors." This dual purpose meant that the county seat congregations paid more attention to external influences than the boomtown congregations, a phenomenon that showed up in ways large and small. One brief example, for now: in preparing to furnish their new temple in 1922, Welch Sisterhood members visited some of the town's newer churches to see how the Christian women had furnished *their* places of worship.[23]

This concern that their congregations conform (within certain limits) to mainstream religious expression, combined with the needs and desires of an American-raised generation, caused Jews in the county seats to move away from their initial Orthodox bent, toward a more Americanized religious practice which one local account described as Reform with "conservative

tendencies." This does not mean they were less committed to Judaism than their counterparts in the boomtowns; as will be seen, they struggled mightily to keep up traditions and instill a Jewish identity in their children. But their communal institutions took a different form from the boomtowns, one more typical of small town American congregations. From the beginning, traditional and modern elements mixed, sometimes in easy coexistence but often with underlying tension and occasionally with overt conflict. Only the largest of the four managed to employ full-time rabbis with some consistency; two never had full-time rabbis at all. All four eventually turned to Hebrew Union College (HUC) for rabbinical support. The Reform seminary (for a moderate fee) assigned participating congregations across the country a student rabbi who came in from Cincinnati on a biweekly basis to lead services, teach the children, and perform other duties; it also offered the option to engage a student for the high holidays only. Largely as a result of their reliance on the student rabbi program, all four coalfield county seat congregations affiliated with the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC).[24]

Of the four towns, Williamson and Welch developed first and so did their Jewish communities. In both cases mutual aid societies preceded congregations: Williamson's Jewish Ladies Guild led the way in 1913, while the men and women of Welch organized separate aid societies in 1915. In the mid 1910s each group acquired a space that it fitted up for services and religious school. The third floor of City Hall housed Welch's "shul room" while Williamson Jews met in the "dugout," the basement of a theater owned by one member. Both communities at first conducted their own traditional Sabbath services and hired visiting rabbis to come in for the high holidays. They next turned to incorporating their congregations and building synagogues, and their aid societies became Sisterhoods and B'nai B'rith chapters. Welch Jews officially organized in 1918 and built Temple Emanuel between 1922 and 1924; Williamson's B'nai Israel

incorporated in 1921 and dedicated its synagogue building, still in use today, in 1928.[25]

Despite these parallel growth patterns, the two congregations offer contrasting examples of how small town congregations handled the transition from Orthodoxy to Reform. Jews in Welch were slower to convert to modern ways. The congregation had a succession of Orthodox rabbis in the early years whom they hired to teach the children and serve as *schochtim*. These were of the itinerant variety, though the congregation intended to employ a permanent rabbi once its synagogue was built. In the meantime they made do; at one 1918 meeting of the Ladies Aid society, the (oddly-spelled) minutes note that "Mr. Smith the Welch shocet, called at this meeting to ask the help of the Ladies at the dedication of the new Sefor Thora. . . . [He] then gave a lecture on Jewidism which was enjoyed by everyone present." Welch Jews also had access to the rabbis/*schochtim* in nearby Kimball and Keystone, whereas Williamson, though home to many ex-Keystoners, was too far away to remain under the influence of those traditionally-oriented communities. In 1922 the Welch ladies chose to affiliate with the Women's League of the United Synagogue of America, rather than the Reform movement's Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, because "this league is Orthodox to its utmost." The following year, however, the women changed their minds and joined the Reform group. Pragmatism had won out—the Federation had a state affiliate that offered more in the way of resources.[26]

But the religious ritual of Welch's Jews remained Orthodox even as they began to draw on the Reform movement for organizational support. In the early 1920s they engaged a Bluefield baker and respected Hebrew scholar, Ben Matz, to live in town several days a week to teach religious school and lead services. However, in a report delivered at a statewide Sisterhood convention probably in the late 1920s, a Welch member assured her Reform cohorts that a process of transition was underway:

> We have in Welch a lovely little Temple Building which is filled to capacity on the two most important holidays of the year but during the rest of the year it is hardly used at all. Services are conducted in the Orthodox fashion, under the leadership of a man who has also been teaching the children for several years. . . . The gentleman who teaches the children is very capable, having modernized his methods to the extent that he teaches Hebrew with the English translation—also Biblical History in English. [The men of the congregation] are thinking of bringing a Modern young leader to Welch, and they have been assured of the hearty support and cooperation of the Sisterhood.

The congregation never did manage to employ a full-time ordained rabbi, modern or otherwise. Instead, it maintained its arrangement with Matz and services remained Orthodox until "the Reform element came on so strongly" in the early 1940s, according to one member. The congregation finally joined Hebrew Union College's biweekly student rabbi program at that time, but did not affiliate with UAHC until 1950.[27]

In contrast to the gradual approach of Welch—where bouts of apathy, rather than controversy, appear to have caused occasional problems—some Williamson Jews tried to bring their congregation into the Reform fold shortly after its founding. They engaged their first HUC student for the 1921 high holidays. Other congregation members were not quite ready for this step, as the unlucky eighteen-year-old found out. In a memoir recalling his first student rabbi experience, Sidney Regner described his attempt to introduce Reform Judaism into Williamson. Upon arriving in town, he met with the woman who had corresponded with him:

> When I asked when I could meet with the choir, she said that unfortunately the members of the choir had gone out of town, and there would be no music for the services. Startled as I was by this unwelcome news, I suggested that we have someone play the piano and we could at least have congregational singing. There was no one in the congregation, she said, who could play the piano.[28] So, that evening, I conducted my first Holyday services—with no music. I noticed

> that the only ones following the services in the prayer book were the members of this woman's family sitting in the front row. They were the only ones who had Union Prayer Books [used by Reform congregations], and they were the only ones to greet me after the services. The following morning they were also the only ones at the services, except for a man who sat there reading a newspaper. The rest were conducting Orthodox services elsewhere. I spent the time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur patching things up. . . . The woman who arranged for the services never told the others that it would be a Reform service. . . . The experience was so discouraging that I almost did not return to the College. To my surprise, they asked for me to return the next year, which I would not do.[29]

After this fiasco, the congregation enlisted the help of Abraham Feinstein, the Reform rabbi in Huntington, West Virginia. By 1923 he was traveling to Williamson monthly to conduct services and assist with the Sisterhood-run Sunday school. Apparently the older, more experienced (and no doubt diplomatic) rabbi helped B'nai Israel's more traditional members adjust to changing times. By 1924, when the congregation again attempted to bring in a rabbinical student for the high holidays, Feinstein could assure HUC officials that the student "will receive the most cordial treatment, that he will find a community well organized and prepared to follow any suggestions he may have to make." He brought Williamson into the UAHC fold around that time. (The women—always a step or two ahead of the men in their embrace of Reform—had already joined the national Reform Sisterhood group.) Yet tensions still remained when the synagogue was built in 1928. Congregation President Harry Schwachter, an avid member of the Reform camp, tried to placate the other side by bringing in a Conservative rabbi to conduct the first high holiday services in the new building. Explains his daughter, "It was a very delicate situation, for several of the Jewish families were quite orthodox (and big contributors) while the remaining families were quite vehemently reform." But when Schwachter

informed an official at the Jewish Theological Seminary that the Reform members were "unanimous in their refusal to wear the traditional skull cap, the yarmulke," the official, "aghast," refused to supply a rabbi and Schwachter ended up again turning to HUC.[30]

The conflict faded away as the influence of older members diminished. When Feinstein left Huntington in 1932, B'nai Israel entered the HUC biweekly program. By the 1940s the congregation had an organ, a youth choir, and a full slate of activities under the enthusiastic encouragement of a series of student rabbis. One of these young men later recalled being "impressed with the whole community set-up. It was a progressive and dynamic community, isolated yet feeling itself a part of the larger Jewish Community outside."[31]

Logan and Beckley offer yet two more variations on the county seat pattern. The Jewish population of Logan experienced sudden growth in the 1910s but then tapered off so that it remained the smallest of the four county seat communities. Its heavily foreign-born character guaranteed that it would tend toward traditionalism. However, its small size limited its ability to hire a rabbi or maintain communal institutions, while its location on a branch of the C&O Railroad separated it from the lively Jewish scene that extended along the N&W main line from Bluefield through McDowell County to Williamson. Its leaders realized that their best hope for much-needed support came from the Reform institutions based in nearby Cincinnati and so the congregation moved quickly into the Reform camp. The community attempted to organize as early as 1916, when Edward Coffman wrote to Hebrew Union College requesting a rabbinical student for the high holidays. He assured the dean that "Everyone of our Jews in this town are very anxious to have services . . . there are about eighteen to twenty who will attend." Logan's Jews began holding regular services on their own in 1918 and the women formed a Sisterhood by 1922, when they affiliated with the national Reform Sisterhood federation. The B'nai El

Congregation incorporated around 1924 and joined UAHC in 1926, with the men forming a B'nai B'rith chapter in 1936. The congregation met in "a fully equipped temple" on the third floor of the First National Bank building before moving into its own building in 1948.[32]

At the urging of the Sisterhood, B'nai El engaged biweekly student rabbis starting in 1925, the earliest of the county seat congregations. The group's request to Hebrew Union College reveals its concerns. "We are only a handful of families but we would do everything to give our children some Jewish education," emphasized Sisterhood leader Gizella Eiland. Efforts to secure a full-time rabbi had failed, she explained, and Logan's religious school, taught by male and female members, had "come to a deadlock" since "none of us have any experience in teaching." She concluded, "[we are] begging you to assign the student rabbi to us." HUC sent Nahum Friedless, an immigrant whose foreign accent would provoke complaints from some of his other postings. Many small town congregations placed a high priority on the impression their student rabbi made on gentiles and preferred the all-American type—but Logan Jews expressed no such cares. As immigrants themselves, they were comfortable with Friedless and pronounced themselves "very well pleased" with his tenure. Future student rabbis would elicit similar expressions of praise and gratitude.[33]

Yet as much as Logan Jews appreciated the Reform seminary's assistance, they were reluctant "converts" to Reform Judaism. In fact, the year before requesting entry into the biweekly program, the congregation had arranged for an HUC student to come out at the high holidays but then canceled at the last minute and brought in an Orthodox cantor instead. The Logan student rabbi who participated in a survey of small town congregations that HUC conducted in 1935 offered a perceptive answer to the question of whether there was a cleavage between Orthodox and Reform Jews in town: while there was no overt conflict, he wrote, "The

cleavage is in each member who has orthodox background, and because of Cincinnati's proximity, must take part in Reform services." He observed that Logan's traditionally-oriented Jews "miss the warmth of old-fashioned services. On reflection, however, most of them realize HUC will keep religion alive in their children."[34]

Beckley's Jewish population developed later than in the other county seats but as the town grew into a regional center, its Jewish community became the largest in the coalfields. Communal activity began in 1921, when high holiday services took place "in honor of Mrs. Sana Moscovitch Pickus, . . . [who] had just arrived from the old country" to be with her three sons. History does not record the reaction of the devoutly Orthodox woman to these services, held in a Presbyterian church and led by a Reform student rabbi. The following year the women organized an informal religious school which met in private homes. In 1925 they formed the Beckley Sisterhood and promptly affiliated with the national umbrella organization. For the next ten years, as Beckley's only established Jewish group, the Sisterhood organized communal events, operated the school, and fundraised for a synagogue building. In 1935 the Beckley Hebrew Association was incorporated and the following year the congregation built Temple Beth El, which remains its synagogue today. The men formed a B'nai B'rith chapter in 1939. In 1954 the congregation established its own cemetery, the only county seat congregations to do so.[35]

From the start, the Beckley congregation managed to contain "a hodgepodge of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform," as one member later put it. "They tried to blend a little of all of that so everybody was happy." Its more formal activities were most definitely Reform. Services organized by the Sisterhood in the early years not only took place in the Presbyterian church (or the American Legion Hall or the Woman's Club) with a Reform rabbinical student or visiting rabbi, but featured a non-Jewish choir. On the other hand, the men gathered informally for

traditional services in private homes, as attested to by "several old and well-used Orthodox Siddurim (prayer books)" resting on the temple's library shelves years later. This dual pattern continued after the temple was built. Though regular Friday night services were "strictly Reform," as late as 1955, according to a congregational history, "minyan services conducted along slightly more traditional lines, with the use of the Union Prayer Book, but with more Hebrew being read, and with the use of Hebrew Psalms, were still being held for those members who requested it . . . in the Temple sanctuary."[36]

The congregation exhibited the same eclectic spirit in regard to its rabbis. For some years it employed biweekly students, but during its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s it supported its own full-time rabbis. The first was Conservative, the rest were Reform. Most stayed only a couple of years, except for Rabbi Abraham Shinedling, who served from 1950 to 1956. In the post-World War II years the congregation also benefited from the spiritual and organizational leadership of pharmacist-and-lay-rabbi Isadore Wein, a Beckley resident whose Orthodox training, liberal views, and inclusive ways enabled him to unify a disparate group. Probably because it had its own rabbis for almost two decades, the congregation did not affiliate with UAHC until 1959, when its membership had declined and it again turned to the Reform seminary for help.[37]

Clearly, the evolutionary path from an informal collection of traditional-minded Jews to a small but fairly well-established Reform Jewish community could take many different twists and turns. But several factors pulled the congregations in the same direction. Hebrew Union College and the other institutional structures of Reform Judaism stand out as a major influence. The Reform seminary provided a practical solution to the problem of finding affordable and reliable religious functionaries, given the limited resources and relative isolation of these small groups. The relationship with Cincinnati (and with statewide and national Sisterhood and B'nai B'rith

umbrella organizations) served as a much-needed link to the organized Jewish world beyond the coalfields. Moreover, as the Logan student rabbi astutely pointed out, even Jews who were uncomfortable with Reform practice realized that a Reform affiliation—and the student rabbis themselves—offered the best chance to accomplish their key goal of instilling a Jewish identity in their children. While some Jewish youth in Keystone found their aging Orthodox rabbi alienating, county seat congregations were forming youth groups guided by leaders who were themselves youthful.[38]

Southeastern Kentucky received fewer Jewish immigrants (or immigrants of any kind) than southern West Virginia or Pocahontas, Virginia, because of the inaccessibility of the L&N Railroad to U.S. port cities, the bleak economic picture in Middlesboro during the 1890s, and the late development of the Harlan coalfield. Moreover, proximity to the well-established Jewish community in Knoxville led some Jews with coalfield businesses to base themselves in that city. This proximity also meant that coalfield residents had access to the resources of the Knoxville community, such as kosher products and the services of rabbis who ventured out to visit their "country cousins." While reliance on Knoxville gave coalfield Jews much-needed support, it might have deterred them from developing their own resources. Neither the Middlesboro nor Harlan communities managed to build a synagogue and there is no evidence that they maintained their own rabbis. Yet but both created institutions that enabled Jews in the Cumberland Gap area to bury their dead, worship on the high holidays, and celebrate life cycle events together.[39]

The two congregations overlapped in time and space, and even attempted to join together at one point. The Middlesboro Jewish community, like those of Pocahontas and Keystone, originated in the 1890s and reached its peak in the 1910s. As early as 1891 a local newspaper

reported that the town's fifteen or so Jewish families (some of German descent) were "discussing the possibility of a synagogue." These plans were probably dashed by the town's spectacular financial crash, which caused a general exodus among all segments of the population. But a core of Jews remained and started to rebuild their community, as shown by an 1897 article reporting that Rabbi Winick of Knoxville had recently visited to circumcise the baby son of William and Bertha Horr, and to "ratify" the marriage of a couple who had eloped: William's seventeen-year-old sister Sadie and twenty-three-year-old Ike Ginsburg (the future mayor). In 1904 the death of Ike and Sadie's six-year-old daughter Rebecca occasioned the founding of Middlesboro's Jewish cemetery on land donated by Sadie's father Ben, a local merchant. This cemetery would serve Jews in the Cumberland Gap area for the next sixty or more years.[40]

As with many Jewish communities, the founding of a cemetery precipitated the founding of a congregation, which occurred around 1905. Since the congregation left no records, its history is sketchy, even down to its name, which one source referred to as Temple of Zion. The group did establish long-term quarters in Middlesboro's Masonic Hall and Orthodox services were led by merchant Sam Weinstein until he moved away in the early 1930s. The women were active: a Society of the Daughters of Zion functioned in the 1910s and a Hadassah chapter existed in the 1930s. Membership drew strongly from the nearby county seat of Pineville as well as many other towns in the area. The need to serve a population separated by miles of winding mountain roads would pose challenges for both the southeastern Kentucky congregations, but also gave their gatherings a festive air. Each meeting was like a reunion, especially since many of the far-flung members were actually related to each other. In later interviews, former congregants recalled how Jewish families would come to Middlesboro from all over at the high holidays and stay for one or two nights in a hotel owned by the Horr family.[41]

Temple of Zion started as an Orthodox congregation, eventually described itself as Conservative, and also held Reform services. Several times in the 1910s and 1920s Weinstein (or another congregant) wrote to Hebrew Union College requesting a student for the high holidays—possibly to conduct Reform services to alternate with his own Orthodox services, since one letter hinted at a growing Reform faction. These requests show a certain amount of ambivalence. Often they were either canceled or made too late in the year, after all the students had been assigned. Student rabbis did occasionally come out, however. Correspondence from 1928 indicates how HUC grappled with the problem of trying to serve traditional congregations. Weinstein informed the dean that his group was Conservative, and received a reply warning that student rabbis used the Union Prayer Book, did "no chanting whatsoever," and used "considerable English." Weinstein said those terms were fine with him, but the dean remained skeptical, suggesting that the group instead hire an Orthodox cantor. But Weinstein persisted, and finally HUC offered to send a young man "who has been raised in an orthodox environment" and was even willing to chant part of the service. Weinstein readily agreed and final arrangements were made. But the congregation also drew on internal Reform leadership; for several years, merchant Louis Sturm conducted Reform services which alternated with Weinstein's Orthodox services.[42]

Weinstein's move to Nashville in 1933 was a blow to the Middlesboro congregation, whose numbers had stagnated since the late 1910s. The center of Jewish life shifted to Harlan, where the Jewish population had begun to grow in the 1920s. After some abortive attempts to organize, Harlan Jews held their first high holiday services in the town's Masonic Hall in 1931. A few weeks later ten men met in Sol Geller's store, where they organized Congregation B'nai Sholom of Southeastern Kentucky. The name reflected a deliberate attempt to reach out to their counterparts in Middlesboro and the other towns of the area. In fact, over the next few months

they held "divisional meetings" in Harlan and Pineville to discuss area-wide organization, with assistance from the UAHC. The first meeting drew an enthusiastic crowd of more than ninety people, and speakers such as David Scott of Pineville and Louis Sturm of Middlesboro pledged support. The new congregation even held its 1932 and 1933 high holiday services in Middlesboro, perhaps in deference to the older group. An invitation was extended to all the Jewish families in the area, with the enticement that "housing of visitors and their families at very reasonable rates have been arranged in the beautiful, clean, and very hospitable New Middlesboro Hotel." Despite organizational help from the Reform movement, services were Conservative. [43]

By 1935 the Middlesboro contingent had dropped out, partly out of religious differences but perhaps also because of the difficult geography. B'nai Sholom now held services and other events only in Harlan, though it continued to draw from other Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia towns around the Cumberland Gap. A 1935 letter from secretary Harry Miller to Harry Linden, a founding member who had moved away, shows the do-it-yourself nature of the services:

> We had Services in Harlan, Rosh-Hashonoh. It was not a very large "Minion". But the services were conducted very quietly, and very timely, just as we had them four years ago, when you were in Harlan. Mr. Rothschild "Davent, Shacharith." Mr. Geller did his "Musaff." And I took care of the English reading and the sermons. We had arranged for the second day . . . a communal dinner . . . at which a few spitches were delivered. . . . Last night, Mr. Geller, Mr. Roodine, and Mr. Bart were over to my house, and we were practicing the singing of "Kol Nidrai."[44]

The congregation grew beyond this homey description, reaching its high point in the 1940s. It set up a permanent space in the Harlan Masonic Hall by 1940, with "all the paraphernalia required for our services," as one member put it. Visiting rabbis came in and an active Sisterhood

organized Purim parties, Bible reading sessions, and charitable activities in support of the war effort and Jewish refugees. In 1941 the women voted "to send flowers to Mrs. Roosevelt upon her visit to Harlan"; this was the only hint in congregation records that the little town this small group of Jews lived in was a place of some national significance. The Harlan congregation lasted until around 1970. The Middlesboro group had stopped functioning long before; once it did, the remaining Jews in town traveled to Harlan or Knoxville to participate in organized Jewish life. [45]

Clearly, the nine coalfield congregations found different ways to organize themselves in response to varying conditions. Yet they all exhibited a vibrancy that reflected the strong desire of their participants to experience Jewish communal life and provide that experience to their children, despite group tensions and periods of apathy. On a swing through southern West Virginia in 1926, a rabbi on a lecture tour marveled at the mini-Jewish civilizations he discovered deep in the coalfields of Central Appalachia.

> Among the unheralded magnificence of West Virginia's majestic mountains, where the bungalows of the coal miners line the roads . . . there are Jewish congregations. In some of these congregations the men wear hats in the synagogue. In others the members import kosher meat. . . . Keystone, Northfork, and Welch are as well organized as any little city in Ohio, with congregation, sisterhood, and religious school. . . . They are merry folk in Logan, and they talk sweetly of New York, Baltimore, and Cincinnati.

His impressions, and those cited above of student rabbis who passed through the region, confirm the liveliness of these communities and the determination of their members to forge the group mechanisms necessary for Jewish survival.[46]

As a basis for social life and source of identity and belonging, as well as a locus for Jewish ritual and education, congregations played a central role in the lives of coalfield Jews, even those

who were not personally religious. But communal institutions were not the only ways to express Jewishness. Issues of religious and cultural identity as well as group solidarity played out at work, at home, and in the society at large—and in turn were reflected back into the communal realm. The following sections will explore the three factors that interacted dynamically to shape Jewish community and identity: economic imperatives, internal religious and cultural needs, and external pressures to conform.

Community, Kinship, and Work

The networks that brought Jews to the region not only made communities possible by providing the jobs necessary to sustain a sufficiently large population, they also ensured that community members would remain enmeshed in a web of economic relations linking them to each other and the Jewish world beyond the coalfields. With some 90 percent of coalfield Jews dependent on jobs tied to Jewish sources, it could hardly be otherwise. Family and economic ties were the first, if not the most important, factor binding the region's Jews. When asked what held the Beckley Jewish community together before the building of the temple in the 1930s, one woman thought for a moment, then exclaimed, "work."[47]

The progression from an economic community to an institutional community has been noted in other studies of American Jewry. Elliott Ashkenazi finds that only after Jews in mid-nineteenth century Louisiana coalesced around "business associations and the family connections derived from them" could they then "work at becoming a full-blown community in all its manifestations." Economic links actually remained the primary force for social cohesion among delta Jews, while the communal institutions of coalfield Jews became their most important bond. Possibly the origins of the two groups (Alsace-Lorraine and Germany versus Eastern Europe)

had something to do with this; everywhere in America, the more traditional Eastern Europeans showed a stronger penchant for communal organization than their German co-religionists.[48]

Regardless of the relative significance of institutions versus networks, the commingling of economic interdependence with kinship and marriage proved a powerful cohesive force in small Jewish communities across the nation, and the coalfields offer no exception. The comment of several interviewees that the region's Jews were "just one big family" had literal as well as metaphorical truth. Families served as the basis for chain migration and for the formation and expansion of businesses, and the familial economic ties that Jews brought to the region were reinforced by marriages that took place after they arrived. Given that the communities started with small groups of extended families, that these families often had lots of children, and that the imperative to marry within the faith was quite strong, it was inevitable that the links between them would proliferate until many of the Jews in the coalfields became somehow related to one another, if only distantly. In fact, when the Bank and Totz families—cousins in the old country—each married into the Ofsa family, these three large McDowell County clans formed the foundation for a network of kin and marital relationships that encompassed dozens of families and extended throughout the region.[49]

As kin networks spread, economic connections did likewise. In these merchant-based communities, there would always be a role for relatives in providing mutual support in the common quest to gain a livelihood. Economic interdependence would in turn reinforce the close ties of kinship. And as long as communities were made up of interrelated families, their communal institutions would themselves be family affairs, to an extent. At least thirteen of the twenty-two founding members of Welch's Congregation Emanuel belonged to four extended family groups; three of the five trustees attending the 1928 dedication of Williamson's new

synagogue were close relatives. Four of the ten men at the 1935 founding meeting of the Beckley Hebrew Association were members of the Pickus family.[50]

Family and economic networks also kept coalfield Jews in close contact with the major centers of American Jewish life. Unlike most other inhabitants of the region, virtually all Jews had family beyond the mountains and many also had jobs that necessitated travel. Despite their location in the heart of Central Appalachia, they were far from isolated. The rail lines built to transport coal to urban areas made those areas—New York, Cincinnati, and especially Baltimore—readily accessible whether for business or visits to relatives. Buying trips to the large Jewish wholesale houses were not just business matters, they were immersions in Jewish culture. One man who accompanied his father on these forays recalled the head of the Baltimore Bargain House giving him a twenty dollar gold piece for his bar mitzvah, while a woman related that her uncle took her to the wholesale giant so she could select her wedding present. Social visits to Baltimore and even New York were common, and coalfield residents occasionally hosted their big city relatives in turn. Guest lists of Jewish weddings, printed in local society columns, almost always record a Baltimore contingent on hand to take part in the communal celebration. Out-of-town connections also provided material support for communal undertakings, as wholesalers donated to synagogue fund drives and other fundraising events. The merchants of Beckley, for example, entered into an arrangement with wholesalers allowing each of them to take a 1 percent discount on their purchases, with the proceeds placed in their Temple building fund.[51]

These outside relationships did much to shore up Jewish identity and keep people from feeling cut off from their roots. Certainly, the existence of a "Manhattan Social Club" in Keystone suggests a Jewish community that did not consider itself remote from the larger body of American Jewry. The city relatives themselves tended to look askance at their country

cousins—one woman recalled that her relatives in Baltimore "used to call us goyim." But to coalfield Jews, links to the outside world provided a lifeline that enhanced and lent legitimacy to their individual and communal efforts to maintain Jewish life in the mountains.[52]

While networks connected them to the outside world, habits of mutual support connected them to their Jewish communal past. The principles of *tzedekah* that permeated life in the old country found expression in the aid societies that coalfield communities set up—often as their very first collective activity—as well as in the pervasiveness of informal loan arrangements. The financial support Jews provided each other helped their communities outlast economically troubled times. Since the ability of each community to thrive was dependent upon the economic survival of its members, there was a strong interconnection between an individual's communal obligations, duty to help others, and own self-interest. And just as in the old country, where mutual aid flourished in the midst of cut-throat competition and internal dissension, communal bonds in the coalfields generally transcended business competition. As one Beckley merchant put it, "Everybody was in competition with each other . . . but there was room for everybody."[53]

The economic realm also bolstered Jewish identity and communal solidarity by offering a platform for Jews to demonstrate to the surrounding society their loyalty to their religion and culture. This can be seen in the newspaper announcements announcing that Jewish businesses would be closed for the high holidays. For those businessmen who devoted most of their waking hours to their work, as well as for highly assimilated Jews, store closings came to serve as one of the few means they had to remind themselves and others of their attachment to Judaism. Several interviewees recalled the importance of high holiday store closings as a public statement of their family's Jewishness—in fact, for some it was the only outward manifestation. As one man explained, "For some people, that's how they found out you were Jewish." The act had

communal as well as personal implications. David Scott, a leader of the Welch Jewish community, would go around to all the Jewish businesses every year to make sure recalcitrant merchants fell in line. He thought it was necessary for the entire Jewish community to express its unity during the most holy week on the calendar. Aside from closing their stores on the holidays, some merchants saw the way they conducted their businesses as an expression of their Jewish heritage. As discussed in chapter 3, Judaic law encompasses rules on how to conduct trade in a fair and ethical manner. Some interviewees observed that by upholding these standards, they were acting out their commitment to living a Jewish life.[54]

However, economic considerations could work against community, in the coalfields and elsewhere. Some people moved away in search of better opportunities. Others became so consumed with their businesses they had no time for anything else. And, of course, there were those "petty business jealousies" mentioned by Ida Bank that sometimes grew into full-blown conflict. Historians have pointed out how economic factors hampered Jewish communal development, as an all-out engagement with capitalism left little time for religion or communal affairs. As Steven Hertzberg writes, "The small size, rapid turnover, and materialistic orientation of the Jewish population inhibited the growth of Jewish institutional life" in nineteenth century Atlanta. The loss of strict Sabbath observance is the most often-mentioned example of how American work patterns disrupted traditional life. Around the country, merchant-based communities were tied to their stores on Saturdays, the busiest shopping day of the week. Their inability to keep the Sabbath highlighted most sharply the contrast with Eastern Europe, where the very rhythms of daily life were guided by Sabbath preparation and observance.[55]

Jewish coalfield residents can tell this side of the story as well. A communal leader who

often became frustrated by the priorities of his fellow Jews declared that "earning a living was more important to them than anything else." Family businesses consumed men and often women as well. "My parents never attended functions of the Temple," one respondent told researcher Jerome David. "They were so busy with the business, they never had time for anything else." Another explained, "All the stores were open til 10 p.m. every evening and til 12 midnight on Saturday. My parents didn't have time for family rituals." Some people tried to incorporate traditional practices into their work lives as best they could. Esther Baloff lit the Sabbath candles in the store on Friday nights when she was working late, while another person recalled that as a child, "I used to take candles down to the store so my father could say the blessings" during Chanukah. But the exigencies of work impeded the ability of coalfield families to follow Jewish ritual, either at home or through their communal institutions.[56]

Sources on coalfield Jewish life are replete with examples of internal economic conflict, from disputes among struggling small shopkeepers to matters of considerable financial import. While Bessie Zaltzman battled Louis and Esther Crigger over the matter of a sick cow (and a copper kettle that Zaltzman insisted the Criggers stole from her), Aaron Catzen and Louis Kaufman's altercation centered around the development of an entire town, Clark, which state Supreme Court records reveal was "incorporated as a municipality . . . as a result of Catzen's efforts." Even a cursory perusal of court records shows Jews on both sides in numerous lawsuits: Lena Totz vs. Abe and Israel Forman, Mary Lopinsky vs. Ben Hurvitz, Zaltzman vs. Shore, Bank vs. Catzen, Goodman vs. Klein, Zaltzman vs. Totz, Kaufman vs. Kirstein, Copelan vs. Sohn. Interestingly, many of these people were related to each other, and court transcripts suggest that their battles were quite fierce, as family squabbles often are.[57]

Most economic quarrels among Jews never reached the courts. Some interviewees mentioned feuds over business matters engaged in by members of the Jewish community, and occasionally congregational records made veiled reference to internal strife. While it is difficult to gauge the impact of such controversies on communal affairs, it would be surprising if they had no effect at all. One clue comes from the 1932 personal notes of a Harlan communal leader trying to bring people together for Sabbath services: "Hyman Sachs will not attend in Mr. Roodine's home. I have often previously remonstrated with him that it is not a personal affair—attending religious services—but to no avail." Considering the small number of Jewish families in Harlan at that time, and the need to assemble a *minyan* of ten men, Sachs's attitude had implications for the entire group.[58]

Finally, just as favorable economic conditions enabled Jews to build their communities, poor economic conditions would prove their undoing. Some economically-motivated attrition occurred even during boom times: young people with no taste for small town merchantry could find little else to do in a region dominated by coal mining. In some families, children were expected not to follow their parents into the family business but to go to college and find other careers. Though some came back to the coalfields as professionals, many more settled in metropolitan areas. But downturns in the coal industry that affected the retail niche were more detrimental to Jewish communities than the lack of non-retail jobs. Merchants and would-be merchants moved frequently, both within as well as from the region, looking for a viable place in a volatile economy, and this geographic mobility took a toll on communal stability. Jewish communities in the early boomtowns lost out to county seats, while county seat congregations expanded and contracted according to the dictates of coal. When the coal economy went into permanent decline in the mid-1950s, out-migration tore through the region's population. For

Jews, whose numbers were small to begin with, this trend constituted an insurmountable blow. The economic explanation for the demise of Jewish communities differs from some accounts of Jewish life in other places, where cultural reasons are cited for why communities did not last. Some people did move away from the coalfields because they wanted to raise their children in a more Jewish environment. Yet the loss of their retail niche had a much greater impact on local Jewish populations than religious or cultural factors.[59]

On balance, the economic realm served as a significant source of strength for coalfield Jewish communities until it dissolved completely—yet from the beginning, economic necessity also forced Jews to alter or drop religious rituals and adjust their communal institutions. The decline of cherished customs was surely felt as a loss by many. And yet, as they Americanized, they did not expect or desire to preserve their old country mores intact and unchanged. Like other first- and second-generation Americans, coalfield Jews aimed to maintain their connection to their religion and ethnic culture *and* achieve economic success. To the extent that economic networks and community/religious ties reinforced each other, they benefited. To the extent that Jewish practice impeded economic progress, they adapted. With the demands of capitalism falling more heavily on the men, perhaps the most significant adaptation would be the emergence of women as organizers and leaders in the communal realm. The following section will explore how coalfield Jews responded to internal motivations to preserve their religion and culture, in their homes and through their communal organizations.

Community, Religion, and Culture

In describing how traditional Judaism became diluted as immigrants adapted to their new environment, American Jewish historians have given different weight to different factors: the

practical impediments to observing Jewish ritual; the pull of assimilation; the priority most immigrants placed on getting ahead above all else; the difficulties of transmitting "the subtle meaning of faith, ritual, and culture" to the next generation; self-selection (those who strayed farthest away from Jewish centers, many contend, were the least religious). Generally the focus is on discontinuity—the loss of tradition or, in more positive terms, the embrace of Americanization—and the forces that provoked change. While change is considered as the dynamic part of the process, the retention of aspects of the older culture is often seen as passive, notes folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: "We tend to think of cultural elements surviving, rather than of people choosing to activate" parts of their tradition. In describing the vibrant culture of New York's East European Jews, for example, Irving Howe states, "Traditional faith still formed the foundation of this culture, if only by providing norms from which deviation had to be measured. . . . The old persisted, stubborn, rooted in the depths of common memory."[60]

But the issue can be viewed from another perspective. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett asserts, "we may want to distinguish between a reluctance to change and a desire to perpetuate. In either case, continuity must be considered as an active process, as an aspect of traditionalizing." Especially in smaller communities where Jews constituted a tiny minority, practical difficulties and assimilatory pressures presented a constant challenge that required active commitment and involvement if any degree of Jewish life was to survive. Sociologists have emphasized the role of individual responsibility in sustaining Jewish identity and community. In America, a land of religious freedom where no legal or social caste distinctions have defined Jews as a group, says Marshall Sklare, "Individual decision is crucial in assuming the role of Jew." And "the smaller the community, the clearer is the threat of assimilation and the clearer it is that the future of Jewish life rests upon the personal decision of each individual Jew." Participants in the 1973

conference of small town Jews (mentioned earlier in the chapter) concurred, concluding that "when all is said and done, the future of small town Jews is dependent on their own will to survive." Often, they must take special steps to ensure that survival.[61]

Coalfield Jews faced all the problems inherent in trying to maintain Jewish life in a small town. Strict Sabbath observance was impossible since Saturdays constituted the most important work day. Observance of the dietary laws was almost as difficult: traditional foods were not readily obtainable and kosher meat ordered from Cincinnati, Baltimore, or Charleston often came spoiled. Not living in a Jewish milieu meant the absence of a cultural infrastructure that went well beyond food. The small size and diversity of the local Jewish population made it hard enough to secure a rabbi or get a *minyan* for services, much less engage in the Jewish-oriented activities available to big city dwellers. Resources for imparting religion and culture to the next generation were sorely lacking, while close contact with gentile friends and neighbors exerted a strong influence on young and old. Children especially became caught up in the preoccupations of their peers—invited to help trim the Christmas tree or color Easter eggs, sharing year-round activities with close friends whose families' Christianity was at the forefront of their lives. The assimilatory tendencies that parents fought against on a daily basis come through in this seemingly trivial childhood recollection from Marilou Schwachter Sniderman: "One night I suggested that we clasp hands all around the table and give a nice Presbyterian prayer as my friends did. This was met with such cool disapproval that I dropped the idea immediately."[62]

The realities of daily life in the region led one interviewee to declare, "It's impossible to practice Orthodoxy in a community like Beckley." Coalfield Jewish immigrants in fact displayed the sort of "eroded Orthodoxy" that historians of other small town communities have identified. They remained attached to tradition even as ritual observance diminished; they considered

themselves Orthodox but did not—could not—follow the all-encompassing traditional way of life. Inevitably, compromise accompanied the very tenacity with which they clung to their customs. A Northfork native recalls that the Northfork Jewish contingent would not ride the train on the high holidays, and would walk on the railroad tracks for one mile to the Keystone synagogue dressed in their holiday best. The women would wear sensible shoes for the trek, carrying their fancier shoes with them—a less-than-satisfactory solution, since Jewish law forbids carrying as well as train-riding on the Sabbath or Yom Kippur.[63]

This particular scenario may have been unique to the southern coalfields, where the steep topography forced pedestrians onto the railroad tracks. But in other ways coalfield Jews, it seems, conformed to larger American patterns in that their Orthodoxy took the form of attachment to traditional synagogue ritual while daily practice slipped away. This type of "religiously inconsistent behavior," with Judaism increasingly defined by "nostalgia and . . . synagogue life," was not limited to small town Jews but marked the entire immigrant generation, states Jeffrey Gurock. Even in New York, Irving Howe notes, "only a minority continued to follow the rituals with literal exactness." Yet in big city Jewish neighborhoods, with a shul on every corner and the pious minority a highly visible presence, "the aura of faith . . . remained strong," bolstering Jewish practice and identity in ways unavailable to small communities. Indeed, the most devout Jews who came to the coalfields probably did not stay long, and even some people who did not consider themselves religious encouraged the next generation to leave. "They wanted [their children] to have more Jewish contact," one woman recalled. The threat of intermarriage lurked behind this desire. Some young Jews felt the same way, and their determination to marry within the faith led them to move out of the region.[64]

But those who remained were equally determined. Hal Rothman writes that "newcomers [to

Wichita] were committed to retaining as much of traditional Jewish ritual as was possible in their new home," and this same impulse characterized newcomers to the coalfields. Though Jews in the boomtowns may have exhibited more ritual tenacity than those in the county seats, all engaged in the "active process" of perpetuation. If they could not maintain a fully Orthodox way of life, they could at least draw on their traditions to construct a fulfilling Jewish existence for themselves and their children, centered around the home as well as communal institutions. The second generation would take up the same task, though with even less emphasis on ritual—and a shift from nostalgic Orthodoxy to practical Reform. Observers noticed how coalfield Jews strove to maintain their religious/cultural identity and remarked on the "pervasive interpersonal responsibility" this effort called forth. A Logan student rabbi observed that given the congregation's small size and "physical separation from the rest of the world, . . . I would have predicted twenty years ago that the community would be dead now. But there are eighteen families who keep the temple going." Sociologist Frank Anthony Fear, who studied three West Virginia Jewish communities in the 1970s, marveled at how, in Williamson, "community is sustained in an environment which harbors the attributes for its own dissolution."[65]

Many forces encourage Jewish identification and community in the face of erosive tendencies. Among them are religious belief, family loyalty, a desire to preserve cherished traditions, a "common ethic" shared with fellow Jews, the universal human need to define oneself and achieve a sense of belonging. The impulse to pass the Jewish heritage onto the next generation stands out as a major impetus. Marshall Sklare, among others, has noted that American Jews' participation in communal institutions and their retention of certain customs have been driven to a great extent by "child-centered" considerations.[66]

All these motivations spurred coalfield Jews, with the fear of losing the children to

assimilation providing the most potent stimulus to organize. They set up religious schools early in their communal development, often as their initial activity. The Harlan community's first meeting in 1931 featured a visiting rabbi speaking on "How Can I Give My Child a Jewish Education?" In 1926 Williamson communal leader Ida Nabe reminded her congregation that "the guiding of the youth of today" was the group's "most important mission." Almost fifty years later Williamson Jews still considered children's religious development to be their "top priority." As one person explained to Jerome David, "In a small town, kids have to know they are Jewish." Yet other priorities were not far behind; the adults wished to meet their own needs as well. Nabe identified three main functions of the Williamson Sisterhood in her speech: "First, religious instruction of our children; second, the support of our charities and institutions; third, helpful in all things congregational." And while education might have provided the theme for the first meeting of Harlan's Jews, the gathering's celebratory air came from the dedication of the Sefer Torah which had been donated by one member.[67]

Ida Nabe's use of the term "helpful" is misleading, since it implies that the Sisterhood played merely a supportive role in congregational life. In fact, women emerged as prime movers in attempts to maintain Jewish identity and practice both within and outside the home. This development, which occurred in small communities across America, could be said to constitute one of the special steps taken to ensure Jewish survival, since historically women's religious role had been confined to the domestic sphere. Although their religious duties were always recognized as significant (much of Jewish ritual takes place within the home), their traditional place was clearly subservient to that of men, who carried out the supreme command to study the sacred texts, went daily to the synagogue to pray, and managed communal affairs. In American

life generally and small towns in particular, women's role expanded as men became preoccupied with economic advancement.[68]

Women's increased communal involvement was paradoxical in that it disturbed traditional gender patterns—but in the service of preserving traditional ways. In fact, even as they redefined their role in Jewish life, female immigrants to the coalfields were more prone than their male counterparts to remain loyal to their Orthodox upbringing. Several interviewees stated that their mothers were "more religious" than their fathers, more attached to Jewish customs, more determined that their children not intermarry. This is not surprising, since it was usually the women's husbands, fathers, and brothers who had decided to follow business opportunities into the hinterlands rather than remain in the sheltering embrace of urban Jewish neighborhoods. Many of the women had been reluctant, or at least had harbored reservations about moving to an area where few Jews lived and where it would not be easy to maintain Jewish practice.[69]

In their new locale, therefore, women made vigorous attempts to recreate a Jewish environment for their families. They began in their customary domain, the home. They continued to light candles on the Sabbath and to prepare traditional meals, especially on the holidays. Considering the difficulties, a surprisingly large number in the first generation managed to keep a kosher household. Several interviewees described their childhood homes as "strictly kosher," though more typical was a man who recalled that his mother tried to keep kosher "as much as she possibly could." Some communities had access to a rabbi who also served as *schochet*; in others, a merchant who had undergone training in Baltimore or the old country slaughtered chickens for local families. (One man recalled the special razor his father used.) But such resources were not always available, and the women tried their best to make do. Some of their strategies were clearly ineffective, if sincere. One man related how his mother brought her own knives to the

local (non-Jewish) butcher and asked him to use them to carve her cuts of meat. But even as the women eventually had to give up various practices, the effort in itself made a strong impression on their children and went a long way toward reinforcing a Jewish identity. Almost all the interviewees pointed to their mothers' example, more than their fathers', as being decisive. As one woman typically put it, "my mother instilled a lot of Judaism into us." A respondent of Jerome David reiterated, "As long as mother was living, I wanted to abide by all the customs. She was the catalyst that kept things together. She was the guiding influence in our home."[70]

Women were generally the last to relinquish strict observance. One interviewee recalled that "except for a couple women," including his mother, all Williamson Jews eventually welcomed Reform Judaism. A respondent told David that even after his grandfather acknowledged that keeping kosher "had outlived its day," his mother "would not change." Women in the second and third generations carried on their mothers' efforts to keep a Jewish home, although they did not keep kosher. As a woman explained to David, "If one does not have Judaism in the home, one will lose it. There is nothing in the community to which the children can relate Jewishly. . . . If I lived in a big city, we would not put as much pressure on ourselves to follow tradition. We want the children to have our heritage." Another observed, "The rabbi comes only bi-weekly. The home is most important. Judaism is home first and then temple." Food played a big role in their strategy, as the following comment reveals: "My family knows they're in a Jewish home. . . . Jewish identity through food. I cook Jewishly all the time." While some may have been more deliberate in their attempts to instill identity than others (who, perhaps, simply preferred the comforts of Jewish food), home-centered Jewish customs remained pervasive. As late as the 1970s David could observe, "On a Friday night in Williamson, one knows it is the Sabbath."[71]

Their concern with Jewish continuity led women out of the home and into the communal

realm, ironically causing them to become active participants in what historian Beth Wenger terms a "new, gender-based reorganization of Jewish communal life" which signified a "radical" alteration in women's place. In the coalfields, as elsewhere, this reorganization was rarely controversial. Women had begun to see themselves as guardians of religion, and men were hard-pressed to disagree. Moreover, their new responsibilities conformed to prevailing American patterns: in society at large, men had largely abdicated religious affairs in their full-time pursuit of capitalist success, leading to the "feminization" of religious life. For Jewish men and women anxious to Americanize without abandoning their religion and identity, the emergence of women's communal role served both goals. And as long as women did not demand public recognition for their leadership, they did not overtly contest preexisting notions of gender relations.[72] Their new responsibilities could be seen as an extension of their customary task as nurturers. For this reason, some historians downplay the most ubiquitous women's group, the temple Sisterhood, as being essentially auxiliary, though others recognize it as crucial to the very existence of Jewish communities in small towns.[73]

In the coalfields, women's impact on congregational development, though indeed significant, was often hidden. They match Wenger's description of women as "unseen caretakers of communal needs," fitting her observation that "It was not uncommon for women's groups to raise money and then allow male-dominated synagogue boards to allocate the funds." Men were the ones who incorporated coalfield Jewish institutions, spoke at dedication ceremonies for newly-built synagogues, served on boards. Certainly they took a major part in communal affairs, but they often needed considerable prodding, and women were a necessary behind-the-scenes force. For example, members of the Welch ladies aid society voted in 1919 to help the faltering men's group "in making their meetings more interesting and get the members to attend the

meetings better." (This mostly seemed to involve serving meals.) After the synagogue was built, the Welch Sisterhood kept things together, since, as one woman put it at the time, the men "have had no real organization, only a few men taking any interest in Temple matters at all."[74]

Women founded most of the coalfield religious schools and, for the most part, served as the teachers. (Even when a rabbi was present the women took on an important educational role—the Welch rabbi relied on them "to make the children be good.") After addressing their children's education, coalfield women's groups embarked on an ambitious agenda to promote full-fledged congregations with regular religious services, programs, and most important, places of worship. The women poured their energy into raising funds to build synagogues. They organized and cooked for the religious/social events that held communities together: Hanukah parties, Purim festivals, community seders. They organized trips to large cities to buy kosher and holiday foods. They made sure that the single men in their midst had a family to go to during Jewish holidays and they hosted visiting rabbis in their homes. When new Jewish families moved into town, they immediately visited the wives and applied peer pressure if necessary to get them to join in. They were not above a little arm-twisting in their efforts to maintain group cohesion; members who missed meetings without a valid excuse were assessed a fine.[75]

The determination of the women to achieve maximum participation was understandable. They instinctively knew what virtually all studies of American Jewry have concluded. To keep traditions within the home was not enough: community remained essential to Jewish identity and observance. As daily practice diminished, the synagogue became the focal point for Jewish expression across the U.S. An organized congregation offered stability in the face of geographic mobility, moral support in the face of assimilation. Religious education, worship, mutual aid, and

a Jewish-oriented social life were all strengthened by the presence of a communal structure. As Williamson leader Leah Shein asserted in a 1926 speech, "Our congregation gives us our religious background. Even the members who do not attend the services are benefited by keeping in touch with Jewish activities."[76]

In small communities, not only did Jews need communal support to practice their religion, they needed it simply to assert their existence as Jews—which explains why small town synagogue affiliation rates have always been far higher than in cities (with rates of 80 to 100 percent not uncommon). In effect, says Marshall Sklare, an individual's decision to affiliate meant "to vote yes to Jewish survival." The need to coalesce transcended religious differences and brought about a phenomenon unthinkable in large cities: adherents of the various branches of Judaism sharing a single congregation, managing to "tolerate or harmonize differences to maintain communal unity," as Leonard Rogoff puts it. To Rogoff, the distinguishing factor of small town Jewish life was "the tighter sense of community fostered by being such a tiny minority." Benjamin Kaplan adds that "group pride" was essential to maintaining identity, with the synagogue, and in particular, the physical presence of a synagogue building, standing as the preeminent symbol of that pride. He concludes that "The survival strength of the small-town Jewish community has been in almost direct ratio to the strength of the local synagogue."[77]

Coalfield Jews exhibited the individual responsibility, sense of solidarity, and synagogue focus necessary to ensure communal survival. "Their desire to identify themselves actively with Jews in an atmosphere which is overwhelmingly non-Jewish" spurred their individual and collective actions, stated Jerome David. One Williamson resident told him, "If a Jew comes to town, he joins the temple; this is understood. It is his duty, what is expected and considered appropriate." But not an onerous duty, as other comments show. "There's a closeness that one

doesn't have in a large town" and "When we get together we feel like one big family" were sentiments expressed by many. Several people emphasized the centrality of the synagogue to communal life. "The temple is the focus. It holds the community together" was a typical statement. One person put it more strongly. "I am thankful to God that there is a temple in Williamson, for without it we would be absorbed in the Christian world. . . . Jewishness in Williamson would disappear." The achievement of a permanent congregational home added a potent combination of practical and psychological benefits that raised the community to a higher level. As one interviewee stated, "We flourished after we built the temple."[78]

Coalfield Jews united to support their congregations despite the indifference of some toward religion—and the strong disagreements about religion among others. Of the original coalfield pioneers, some conformed to historians' depictions in their lack of piety while others were quite devout. Yet even the non-religious were among the key founders of their congregations. Many non-believing Jews attended services regularly, viewing the synagogue as "more of a symbol than anything else" and their participation as an expression of solidarity. Meanwhile, others agreed to disagree. Services in Harlan in 1932 featured both the Union Prayer Book and Adler's Prayer Book, with no apparent problems. Participants designed the services as they pleased, without worrying about inconsistencies or justifications. In Beckley, Jews "all pulled together for the temple" despite their considerable religious diversity, one man noted. His Orthodox father walked to shul, Reform members drove, and when they arrived, "they would have a little bit of the service from each one." What they shared was an "amazing" amount of pride in the temple. Another Beckley resident stated that his Orthodox parents did not care that the temple was basically Reform. They were just glad it existed.[79]

Their communal organizations helped coalfield Jews maintain a connection to their Jewish

roots and to the concerns of world Jewry in ways their economic links could not achieve. Collective charitable endeavors enabled them to consciously assert their identity. At first their activity revolved around support for indigent Jews in Europe, Palestine, and the U.S. As a typical example, the beneficiaries of the Welch Hebrew Ladies Aid Society included an orphan asylum in Palestine, the Orthodox Jewish Home for the Aged in Cincinnati, and the Fund for Rabbis in War-Stricken Countries. The women also raised funds on behalf of local Jews who had received personal appeals from relatives in the old country, including the "hunger-suffering" sister of Keystone's rabbi. Relief efforts went into high gear in the World War I years, as coalfield Jews participated in national campaigns to alleviate the dire plight of East European Jewry. In McDowell County the effort took a high profile as Jews sought contributions from their neighbors. The *McDowell Recorder* reported that the 1916 National Relief Day "was a busy day with our local Israelites. They organized in a business-like manner and went to work quietly and systematically. . . . Their friends and relatives to the extent of nearly ten millions are homeless and starving and driven around like cattle in the snow and rigor of a Polish and Russian winter." As historian Daniel Soyer points out, relief work provided a "concrete . . . link between the immigrant and the hometown." This link meant as much to Jews in the Central Appalachian mountains as it did to members of *landsman* groups in New York City.[80]

Although coalfield residents referred to their efforts as "charity," their activity reflected traditional Jewish customs associated with *tzedekah*. Beneficiaries included organizations whose mutual aid roots extended back to Europe, such as the matzo funds of Baltimore and New York, set up to enable the Jewish poor to observe the Passover holidays. In 1916 the Welch ladies obtained "charity boxes" from Kimball's Rabbi Teich; probably, as in the old country, they kept the boxes in their kitchens and dropped in a few coins before the Sabbath. Other efforts were

more political than charitable: in 1933, the Harlan congregation sent resolutions to FDR and the U.S. Ambassador to Germany protesting against "the Haman-like designs of the German Hitler against German Jews," while the Welch B'nai B'rith participated with groups around the state to get the governor to declare "Palestine Day" in 1944. In later years Israel became the focus of support. The field director of the United Palestine Appeal visited Logan in 1938 and complimented the group on its dedication. Hadassah chapters and youth groups such as the Maccabees proved popular in some towns, and United Jewish Appeal fund drives played an important role in the social calendar.[81]

Contributing to "outside worthy causes" enabled Jews to participate in "something nobler, something higher, something grander" than their own local needs, Williamson's Leah Shein stated. Their desire to participate in Jewish culture led them beyond the coalfields in other ways as well. Members of the immigrant generation received Yiddish newspapers while others also subscribed to Jewish publications. In 1916 alone, at least twenty-four residents received the offerings of the Jewish Publication Society of America. More than fifty years later, Jewish publications were still "read avidly" in Williamson. Sisterhood meetings featured book reviews (including titles such as *Gone with the Wind* and *Tobacco Road* as well as Jewish books), papers delivered by members on Jewish topics, and discussions of current events related to Jewry.[82]

Efforts to expand their Jewish cultural horizons were enhanced by the rabbis and rabbinical students who passed through the region. The congregations brought in guest rabbis not only to conduct services, but to speak at special events such as synagogue dedications. While such events offered rare opportunities to hear respected Jewish leaders, most contact with national Jewish "officialdom" came through the HUC's student rabbi program. Coalfield congregants responded favorably to the adult education initiatives of their youthful leaders. In 1950, Welch

student rabbi Jakob Petuchowski (who went on to become a much-published theologian at Hebrew Union College) led a discussion series on "Judaism and Christianity" with topics that included, "Do you hesitate to express a difference of opinion or to contradict when you are with Christians?," "Are Jews more clannish than Gentiles?," and "Someone has said that 'the two religions are truly, basically one.' What is your opinion?"[83]

Student rabbis could be "a powerful and dynamic force" in stimulating congregants far removed from Jewish centers to explore and express their heritage. They brought the latest in rabbinical trends into the region. As one who served in Welch in 1943 later wrote, "I remember being filled to the brim with Franzblau's ideas on progressive education. I recall doing a number of things to bring the instruction 'up-to-date' in Welch. One specific project was the building of a model Biblical village." Coalfield residents appreciated the guidance of these students. Said one, they "helped us come in contact with the outside world, so that we could keep abreast of what was going on in the world-wide Jewish community." A Logan resident recalled having students from Istanbul and South Africa. "We were lucky we got 'em. It made it a little more interesting," he said. Petuchowski later remarked on the enthusiasm of the Welch Jewish community. "That small congregation undertook the publication of my Ph.D. thesis, 'The Theology of Haham David Nietho, An Eighteenth Century Defense of the Jewish Tradition,' the funds being furnished by Mr. Samuel Polon." The future theology professor dedicated his work to the *McDowell Recorder*'s "red-headed hustler": "To Samuel Polon, lover of Torah, who made the publication of this volume possible."[84]

A willingness to travel further mitigated the remoteness of coalfield Jews from the main body of American Jewry. A "longing for Jewish contact" led them not only to visit city relatives, but to attend out-of-town meetings of Jewish organizations. Parents sent their children away to

expose them to Jewish life: boys went on extended visits to Baltimore, where they stayed with relatives while studying for their bar mitzvahs; girls and boys attended Jewish summer camps, where they joined children from around the South and Midwest whose parents were similarly concerned to "give a Jewish substance to their lives," as Eli Evans recalls about his North Carolina childhood. Teenagers eagerly participated in regional and national youth groups. For several generations, people looking to marry within the faith journeyed to Jewish centers—some (in the early years) to enter into arranged marriages—and many returned with their new spouses. Some parents sent their children to unlikely places: to expose her sons to a larger Jewish community than the one they knew in LaFollette, Tennessee (where her brother's family were the only other Jews), Esther Baloff enrolled them in military school in Chattanooga. Both sons ended up finding Jewish brides and bringing them back to LaFollette to live.[85]

Although coalfield congregations benefited from the resources of the outside world, their own internal resources proved to be the most important means of creating a Jewish life in their small mountain towns. Interviewees and congregational records portray highly active Jewish communities, with a year-round schedule of holiday observances and life cycle celebrations buttressed by routine events, from organizational meetings to social gatherings after weekly Sabbath services to card parties. Communal activity saw its ups and downs, as periods of apathy sometimes set in and—more worrisome—periods of economically-induced population decline demoralized the remaining residents. But the communities managed to re-emerge from these lean times and resume their active pace. A good example of their ability to rally comes from Williamson, where one man told a researcher as late as 1972 (when the Jewish population was already in permanent decline),

> I have to admit our B'nai B'rith almost went under a few years ago. We never used to meet and when we did, all we would do was play cards. . . . The national B'nai B'rith sent one of their regional men down from Pittsburgh and he about pleaded with us to keep the thing alive. Everything's going pretty good now, almost every man in the Jewish community belongs.[86]

One key to the communities' "will to survive" was strong leadership: in each congregation, there were members who took responsibility for ensuring that the necessary work got done. More important, the "special closeness between Jewish families," mentioned by so many interviewees, lent a strong dynamic to organizational life. Although much communal activity had some kind of religious or organizational purpose, the purely social aspect of these events should not be underestimated. Coalfield Jews found comfort and enjoyment in being around people with whom they felt the most socially and culturally compatible, with whom they could share familiar customs and pastimes. The impulse to socialize with their fellow Jews and the impulse to maintain their religious and cultural identity were mutually reinforcing.[87]

Among the immigrant generation especially, Jews in small town America often got together to experience "the comfort and security of Yiddishkeit in alien territory," observes Leonard Rogoff. Whether moved by a sense of apartness from non-Jews or feelings of camaraderie for each other (no doubt, both) Jews in the coalfields tended to stress the positive. As one David respondent stated, "Living in a small town, . . . one socializes with non-Jews and Jews. I can feel comfortable either way. I feel *more* comfortable with Jews." Their joy in coming together to recreate familiar ways comes through in interviews, congregational records, and newspaper articles. The Simchas Torah festivities in Harlan in 1931 and 1932 were celebrations of Yiddish culture, featuring speeches and readings in Yiddish by some members and Yiddish songs sung by all. The invitation to the 1932 event announced "The Joyousest Time of the Year. Gefilte Fish, Roast Chicken, Hot Perakas, Plenty of Ch'rain. A Program of Jolly Good Fun." Guests

arrived decked out in ceremonial splendor and costumes. Mr. Roodine "wore a brand new satin Kapota which reached to his ankles," donned a long black beard, sniffed imaginary snuff and "sneezed most heartily and artistically," noted the congregational minutes. As the invitation suggests, food provided an important cultural bond outside as well as inside the home. In Middlesboro, the restaurant run by "Mother Horr" offered matzo ball soup and chopped liver and served as the main gathering place for the town's Jews. Louis Morse, proprietor of the Welch Billiard & Bowling Parlor, evidently considered Jewish food enough of a draw to advertise in a 1922 Welch newspaper, "A Pleasant Retreat for Business Men and for all who seek diversion. Kosher meats by the pound."[88]

Social activities with fundraising as the primary focus of communal groups. Welch's Minyan Club, "composed of the Jewish young men of Welch," held parties in its club room for the town's Jewish youth in the 1920s. But most organized events combined socializing with a more serious purpose. Dances, luncheons, and card parties held to raise money were staples on the social calendar. Community seders, Purim festivals, and Chanukah celebrations drew large crowds. One student rabbi recalled a lively Purim party in the 1940s "which degenerated into a poker game with the officers of the Temple taking a cut from each pot." In the early years, each community had members known for their devoutness, whose presence reminded everyone else of the religious basis behind their communal activities. In later years, people drew on the example set by their parents and the sermons of their student rabbis to keep the link between Judaism and Jewish communal events in the forefront. On the other hand, coalfield Jews did not need a religious excuse to get together; many gatherings had no formal connection to communal organization at all. And if they wanted a larger pool of Jewish people to socialize with, they traveled to nearby regional centers such as Bluefield, Charleston, or Knoxville.[89]

Asked to describe how his family maintained a Jewish identity, a man who grew up in Northfork in the 1920s and 1930s summed up, "My mother kept kosher, she made traditional Jewish dishes. We observed the Sabbath, except Dad had to work. We observed the Jewish holidays. We had a synagogue and helped support it. We had other Jewish friends who had varying degrees of *Yiddishkeit*." Such indigenous resources for Jewish survival, along with outside connections actively cultivated, led Jerome David to conclude that coalfield Jews experienced "physical isolation" from Jewish centers, but not "social isolation." While their ways of expressing Jewishness changed over time, this combination of resources served their communities well for at least three generations.[90]

Community and Assimilation

Of all the threats to the perpetuation of American Jewish life, assimilation and its corollary, intermarriage, have probably received the most attention in the literature, with small Jewish populations seen as most vulnerable to these challenges. Yet commentators have also identified special factors that have reinforced Jewish identity in small communities. First, as just discussed, inner motivations to retain their cultural and religious heritage caused people to make extraordinary efforts that sometimes resulted in a richer Jewish existence among people who could not afford to take their Jewishness for granted. Second, problems relating to the surrounding society—such as feelings of alienation from non-Jewish culture (especially concerning Christianity) and non-acceptance on the part of gentiles—led Jewish communities to turn inward to develop their own communal life. A third factor was more subtle. Communal institutions provided a means to reconcile two potentially conflicting goals held by virtually all American Jews: to fit into the broader society and yet keep a distinct identity. In small cities and

towns, religious institutions conferred respectability, weightiness, belonging—especially in the religion-soaked atmosphere of the South. As author John Shelton Reed writes, "By participating in organized religious activities, Southern Jews are at the same time more Jewish" and "more Southern." A Jewish man from Welch put it even more succinctly: "In a small town, *everybody* belongs to a church." The urge to assimilate, therefore, encouraged communal development.[91]

While a small number of coalfield Jewish residents preferred not to mix with gentiles at all, most wanted to participate in the larger community as well as the Jewish community. They sought the comforts and traditions of their own group but also strove for middle class affiliation in the context of coalfield society. As a Beckley man explained, although his religion and ethnic heritage were important to him, "being Jewish is not my entire world." Nor did individuals see their identities as Jews and as middle class coalfield residents as contradictory. A lifelong Logan resident, describing the highly assimilated nature of his town's Jewish population, added as if surprised there could be any doubt, "of course we stayed Jewish." Another coalfield native could remark, "one thing about being Jewish—you're always Jewish," and yet be thoroughly at home in his environment and married to a non-Jew. Interestingly, when Jews who grew up in the coalfields traveled outside the region to go to summer camp or to attend college, they discovered that it was the regional aspect of their identity that suddenly became prominent. For example, Marilou Schwachter Sniderman found out she had a "southern hillbilly accent" only when she auditioned for a theater role at Ohio State University.[92]

These statements simply reflect the reality that people are complex beings with multiple facets to their identity. Given the "dynamic process" of identity construction, writes Sander Gilman, "there is no such thing as a 'purely' Jewish identity." Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett offers a useful way to consider the issue, noting that since "ethnic identity is only one of several

identities. . . . Perhaps the question should be rephrased: not, What is Jewishness? but rather, When does an individual foreground his identity as Jewish, by what means, and to what ends?"[93]

For Jews in the coalfields, communal activity furthered a variety of ends. It offered a way to experience Jewishness and a refuge against an omnipresent Christianity—while also providing a way to relate to non-Jews and participate in the everyday concerns of small town life. Individuals differed as to which of these ends was most important, but membership in the Jewish collective helped each of them to assert, and to integrate, at least two of their multiple identities. As Marshall Sklare notes, people define themselves in relation to others. "It is not enough that an individual considers himself Jewish: he must be so considered by other Jews as well as by Gentiles." Communal participation enabled individuals to declare their identity as Jews, while the way their organizations functioned within the larger society enabled members to declare their identity as respectable, neighborly, and civic-minded small town dwellers. The following will explore the various ways their communal groups helped Jews accomplish the "balancing act" between upholding Jewish heritage and assimilating into coalfield society, and the adaptations that they made during the process.[94]

Coalfield Jewish communities offered their members welcome relief from the more alienating, or simply unfamiliar, aspects of the dominant culture. They could not be fully comfortable in a milieu that had Christianity as one of its most important and visible characteristics.[95] In turn, coalfield society was not always ready to accept Jews in every role and a certain amount of social exclusion did exist. Meanwhile, their own background featured centuries of unease, if not outright distrust and hostility, with the gentile majority—a cultural legacy that could not be completely shed in one or two generations. For new arrivals, the

opportunity to come together with people of similar background, to socialize and share in familiar customs, helped with the adjustment to a new and strange environment. When Esther Sturm Baloff first moved to the region in the 1910s, despite the friendliness of the local townsfolk, "I was lonesome . . . It was different when you're not among your own kind of people." Even years of residency did not always dispel feelings of "otherness," as Jerome David found. Though most people he interviewed described themselves as comfortable with gentiles, not all could make that claim. As one person told him, "I can't be myself except when I'm with fellow Jews." The ambivalence he encountered led him to conclude that although Williamson Jews were much involved in the larger society, they "still feel set apart. On the one hand, they attempt to penetrate non-Jewish circles, but on the other hand, they huddle together defensively." This defensiveness must be considered part of the glue holding Jewish coalfield communities together.[96]

Conversely, just as important as providing a haven from strange or disquieting elements of the dominant culture, communal organization served as a bulwark against the attractions of that culture. Their high level of integration exposed Jews to the danger that some of their number would disappear entirely into coalfield society and stop being Jews, either through intermarriage or simply through disaffiliation. They feared most, of course, for their own children, and these fears were not unwarranted. Intermarriage began as early as the 1910s when Celia Ofsa of Keystone married family neighbor Charles Hoover. Her parents Max and Dena, known for their devout Orthodox beliefs, refused to speak to her for nine years, causing a family breach that never completely healed. As it turned out, half of the Ofsas' twelve children married within the faith and the other half did not. By the time the youngest, Isadore, took a gentile bride, his parents had become resigned to the situation and welcomed their new daughter-in-law into the

family. As Isadore's wife Mary later recalled, "They were so good to me it was like they adopted me." Her mother-in-law taught her how to make matzo ball soup and other Jewish foods, and her father-in-law taught her about the Jewish religion. But Mary and Isadore did not raise their children as Jews; the Keystone synagogue had closed by the time the children came of age and instead they went to church with their friends.[97]

As intermarriage became a coalfield reality, Jewish families responded with a dual strategy in which communal organizations played an important part. First they tried to prevent it through religious education, a focus on child-centered holidays and activities, and exposure to Jewish culture outside the region through youth groups and other means. This strategy achieved a good deal of success as many who grew up in the region remained committed to finding a Jewish partner. (One young man was packed off to work in the diamond industry in New York and told that "he should come back after he married Jewish," both of which he did.)[98]

Once an intermarriage did occur, the county seat congregations accepted mixed couples and encouraged them to raise their children as Jews. The flexibility of these congregations, made possible by their move to Reform Judaism, enabled them to keep a substantial number of families within the Jewish fold. (Meanwhile, evidence from the Ofsa family suggests that the Orthodox Keystone congregation had no mechanism for addressing intermarriage: none of the intermarried Ofsas raised their children as Jews). The 1935 HUC student rabbi survey reported that in Logan and Williamson, all the children of mixed households were being raised Jewish. Ten years later one-third of the children in the Williamson religious school came from intermarried families and in the 1970s most children of mixed marriages were still being raised as Jews. The 1935 HUC survey-taker in Beckley stated that "none" of the children of intermarried couples remained Jewish, but he may have been overly pessimistic. A local history

notes that gentile women joined the Beckley Sisterhood early on and became active members. In an interview, one non-Jewish woman recalled that after her 1950s marriage, the Sisterhood "accepted me immediately" and she eventually became the group's president. Although she never converted, she raised her children as Jews. "I feel like that's my temple," she explained.[99]

There were enough examples of individuals who did leave the fold, however, to give coalfield Jews pause. They took note of those who abandoned the Jewish community after marriage to a gentile, and disparaged those (very few) who chose to associate only with gentiles without the impetus of intermarriage. But cases of Jews who completely turned their backs on their co-religionists were rare. The handful of German Jews who lived in the region were more likely to disaffiliate than the East Europeans, but their actions were probably not seen in the same negative light, since they were barely a part of the Jewish community to begin with. Pocahontas's German Jewish pioneer Michael Bloch and his family belonged to the Methodist church and most of the third generation Blochs and Baaches who remained in the region married outside the faith. Interestingly, though, Bloch and his brother-in-law Jacob Baach continued to consider themselves Jews. Bloch remained a subscriber to the Jewish Publication Society of America, while Baach left money to Jewish charities and made careful mention in his will to leave his Jewish Encyclopedia set to his son Louis.[100]

Although German Jews showed greater propensity to disaffiliate than the East Europeans, the difference between the two groups in level of integration was not that great. The Orthodox Jewish families who founded all the coalfield congregations were thoroughly engaged in the assimilation process even as they began to organize communally. As mentioned in chapter 4, women in Welch belonged to the Methodist ladies aid society before starting up their own

group—and yet the group they started was the most Orthodox of all the county seat congregations. No doubt, they had no intention of permanently associating with the Methodists; they were probably simply waiting for their numbers to grow large enough to support their own organization. But perhaps they also realized that having their own group would enable them to withstand the temptations provided by a wide open society that seemed so ready to include them. Certainly they must have felt more comfortable relating to their Methodist friends from the position of strength afforded by having their own organizational structure, one that allowed them both to satisfy their longing for Jewish association and to assert with pride their identity not only as Jews, but as members of the Welch middle class.

The ultimate form that Jewish communities took reflected the jumble of motivations that existed within their individual members. While some may have been especially moved by a need to experience Jewish religion or culture, and others chiefly by a desire to separate themselves from gentiles, there were those who cared above all about how the Jewish community interacted with, and was perceived by, society at large. They saw communal organization as an expression of group pride and an assertion that the Jewish population had a proper place among the groups that made up coalfield society. In later years, Jerome David found that Jewish natives of Williamson were more likely than those who grew up outside the region to have this consideration uppermost. Yet from the start, the way they conducted their communal affairs suggests that most Jews who settled in the coalfields wanted their organizations to accord with societal norms. They wanted to fit in and to be recognized as fitting in—as Jews.[101]

Among some this was a matter of overriding significance. Harry Schwachter, according to his daughter, "felt the importance of having a semblance of pride in his Judaism" and was personally insulted by the "unsightly" surroundings of the Williamson congregation's rented

quarters. But "religion had never played much of a part in his busy life," and he was not moved to become seriously involved in communal affairs until one day in the mid-1920s when he was chatting with a non-Jewish friend in his store. Two coal miners walked in, talking animatedly in Hungarian. Schwachter joined their conversation, and "the three men spoke that wild language with dozens of excited gestures for at least ten minutes." After the miners departed, his friend turned to him and said, "'Harry, I shore owe you a big apology, ole pal. . . . I allus figured you was a damn Jew!'" Schwachter, "hurt and stunned" by the man's comment, decided that it was "time for Williamson Jewry to be recognized in a more refined way," and threw himself into the campaign to build a synagogue. "It was a personal crusade as well," says his daughter, "for he intended never again to be identified as "that damn Jew." Not one for half measures, Schwachter became president of the congregation. In 1928 he officiated at the dedication ceremony for the new temple, an event that featured prominent ministers and town leaders, thus fulfilling his quest to prove the respectability of the Jewish community.[102]

While perhaps not spurred on by a personal slight, others shared Schwachter's concerns. Isadore Scott, son of Welch Jewish community leaders David and Libby Scott, recalled that "My family thought you must show the [larger] community your respect for your religion . . . your self-respect." Coalfield Jews recognized that closing their stores on the high holidays, building and maintaining houses of worship, and other public expressions of their faith were important not just as symbols of solidarity within the Jewish community, but as a statement to their fellow citizens, a declaration that Judaism had a place alongside the many Christian denominations, and that Jews belonged as much as Christians. As Scott put it, "The idea was to maintain the synagogue as a symbol of Jewish life" in the eyes of the public. Their actions illustrate Leonard Rogoff's contention that "in erecting their edifices Jews and Christians alike were not just

gathering to worship their God, but to stake out civic space."[103]

In order to occupy that civic space, it helped to conform to a certain standard of religious behavior. Yet this did not necessarily mean compromise or dilution of belief. If anything, the religious fervor characteristic of the region encouraged Jews to express their own religiosity. Jerome David suggested that the "environment of devoutness perhaps generates a climate in which Jews also grow more aware of their own religion." In the Scott family, the importance of upholding a public decorum and self-respect regarding Judaism went hand in hand with religious conviction and expression. More than fifty years after moving away from the region, Isadore Scott affirmed, "I still *daven* every day. . . . It's the way Welch taught me to be." While high synagogue affiliation rates in coalfield towns owed much to the resolve of individual members to contribute to Jewish survival, no doubt the high church affiliation rates among Christians helped confirm them in their actions. Meanwhile, the tendency for coalfield social groups to form around church affiliation could only help but serve Jewish communal aims. Jews could not be considered "clannish" or unduly prone to associating only amongst themselves when members of every church denomination were busy doing the same thing.[104]

Moreover, some traditional Jewish organizational forms (aid societies, for example) had close counterparts in Christian organizational life. By recreating these old-style groups, coalfield Jews could express their identity and address communal concerns, yet in ways similar to their churchgoing neighbors. Even one important break with Jewish practice—the rise of women's groups—advanced communal and religious goals while conforming admirably to patterns of behavior in the surrounding society. And, as discussed in chapter 4, Jews could use their communal groups to interact with their gentile peers in the civic and social arenas. Historians have differed regarding how much American Jewish communal structures drew on old country

traditions versus how much they were shaped by the American milieu. Perhaps the influence of the local environment is best summed up by Marshall Sklare, who states that Jews in the U.S. tended to keep up customs that "accorded with the religious culture of the larger community while providing a 'Jewish' alternative," while customs that "demanded social isolation or the adoption of a unique life style" tended to be dropped.[105]

In the coalfields, as elsewhere, many traditions that did not blend in well with mainstream religious practice fell by the wayside. The occasion of building a synagogue was seen as an opportunity to modernize services (though not by everyone): the increased respectability symbolized by the outward face of the new edifice was to be accompanied by increased decorum inside. One Williamson congregant recalled that "at the dugout [the rented quarters] it was more Orthodox, they wore Yarmulkas, prayer-shawls, and *davened*." The new buildings erected by county seat congregations featured family seating, an affirmation that the traditional male *minyan* was on its way out. In fact, the construction of a permanent house of worship was a key point in the transition from Orthodoxy to Reform. As community members turned their focus from supporting outside Jewish causes to raising funds for their organizational needs, the old-style (though perfectly presentable) aid societies gave way to the more Americanized auxiliary model for women (the Sisterhood) and fraternal club model for men (B'nai B'rith). Indeed, as Jacob Rader Marcus points out, the institution of the "congregation" itself was a Protestant-derived innovation. In the old country, communal institutions such as aid societies and synagogues existed in cities and towns without the need for Jews to arrange themselves into specific religious bodies centered around a single institution.[106]

Therefore, their organizations helped coalfield Jews negotiate the subtle terrain between difference and belonging. In the communal setting, they could work out internal tensions caused

by the "push and pull between tradition and assimilation." As the years went on, not surprisingly, the movement was toward increased adaptation to the coalfield environment and loss of customary practices—not so much because of a conscious desire to conform, but because the older ways seemed less relevant and understandable to an American-raised generation. Indeed, influences from the surrounding society seeped in often unnoticed, as suggested by an offhand note in the 1935 minutes of the Williamson Sisterhood that "the flowers in the temple on Easter Sunday were sent by Mr. Hammond of the Mark Russell Seed Co." While a special display of flowers on Easter may have struck some of the older members as incongruous, to others it was probably just a minor example of the congregation's success in establishing itself as a presence amidst the other religious organizations in town.[107]

For most immigrants, compromise in Jewish practice was a matter of necessity resulting from economic demands. Steeped in Jewish culture from birth, the "typical immigrant" remained "loyal to his religious past," says Jacob Rader Marcus. "Standards might be ignored but they were not forgotten." Transmitting this "lax Orthodoxy" to an Americanized generation proved difficult, observes Leon Jick. Parents "could not communicate their visceral affection for the old forms to a new generation that had no memories of the fullness and warmth of the tradition." Children instead saw unexplained inconsistencies and rituals without meaning. Jewish education often consisted of "rote training" with little emphasis on understanding, notes Leonard Rogoff. While this method might have worked in the old country, it did not resonate with children breathing the "cultural air" (in Louis Schmier's phrase) of the new world. The problem was not unique to Jews in small communities, where gentile influences were all around, but also pertained to life in New York City, where youth were lured by what Irving Howe refers to as

"the street." Inevitably, though, smaller communities lacking in Jewish infrastructure found it more difficult to "pass on their outlook and practices to a second generation," asserts Lee Shai Weissbach, and their children "invariably came to adopt a way of life that was far less intensively Jewish."[108]

Yet, while Howe documents how the "growing estrangement of Jewish youth" in New York City led to "unbearably fierce" generational conflict, chroniclers of small town Jewish life rarely find overt defiance among the young. The pressures of being a small minority, of having to show solidarity with the group, made children less inclined to rebel. But equally important, their parents, unlike Howe's immigrant tenement dwellers, were adapting to their gentile surroundings not just by relinquishing customs that could no longer be practically maintained, but also by changing their views to be more in line with the modern American society in which they found themselves. In most cases, this involved a movement toward Reform Judaism.[109]

In the coalfields, the modernizing of religious practice had complicated effects, but clearly helped Jewish communities survive. Among members of the immigrant generation, some favored change because it corresponded to their own sense of how they wanted to relate to the surrounding society. Others, such as those described earlier by the Logan student rabbi, saw change as a sacrifice they were prepared to make in order to transmit Judaism to their children. One Williamson Jew who arrived in the post-World War II years acknowledged, "What turned me toward Reform was that my son liked Reform so much. . . . It was nice to see my children appreciate what was going on in Temple, unlike when we were children in shul. It's nice to sit all together on a Friday night." These factors, along with the practical advantages of associating with the Reform movement (availability of student rabbis, organizational support from UAHC) combined to make Reform Judaism the all-but-inevitable choice of Jews in the county seat

towns. Meanwhile, the Orthodox Keystone congregation experienced problems with its younger generation, as some young people stopped attending services and others—the intermarried—dropped out of the community altogether.[110]

As elsewhere, religious modernization occurred unevenly and with plenty of contradictions. Women were the first to perceive the benefits of Reform. Their increased communal role gave them obvious reasons to support innovations such as family seating, while their guardianship of children's education caused them to promote involvement with the student rabbi program. But even while breaking new ground the women clung to tenets of traditional Judaism that felt right to them. The Williamson Sisterhood, for example, sponsored an annual religious service in the 1920s which was led entirely by women. This surely would have been considered ridiculous in Eastern Europe, if not dangerously revolutionary. Yet the same women focused their education efforts on boys, to make sure they were prepared for the traditional bar mitzvah. Into mid century, many coalfield women tried their best to keep a kosher home, a practice considered obsolete by most adherents of Reform Judaism at that time. Meanwhile, although the modern form of Judaism adopted in the county seats succeeded in keeping the younger generation in the fold, many went on to conclude, as adults, that their religious training had not been rigorous enough. One Williamsonian described the religious school as "a farce," while another called his bar mitzvah "a sham." A Logan interviewee reported the typical American experience of Hebrew school: "All we learned to do was read it—we didn't understand it."[111]

Yet even these criticisms show that parents managed to instill a strong Jewish identity under difficult conditions. One person, while complaining of growing up with a lack of "formal Judaism," acknowledged that "we had a Jewish consciousness." Another, referring to the family's preoccupation with work, stated, "My parents didn't have time for family rituals. I don't

remember a Seder at home. Yet I knew when I grew up, I would observe these things." Some Jews raised in Williamson "feel that they have a stronger Jewish identity than their parents," David found. As parents themselves, they evidenced "a deep sense of satisfaction for they feel they have been able to transmit a love of Judaism to their [own] children."[112]

A combination of flexibility and commitment enabled coalfield communities to perpetuate a Jewish way of life within an overwhelmingly Christian society. While some interviewees recalled with admiration and wistfulness the struggles of their elders to uphold traditional standards, others could not quite say how their parents managed to pass on their heritage. "What we learned was through osmosis," stated one woman, whose family lived beyond reach of the county seats and rarely attended services. "Definitely a Jewish home. . . . You could be Jewish without going to a synagogue or temple. We just absorbed it." In fact, the home and the communal realm both proved to be key spaces for enacting Jewish identity and communicating it to the next generation. During his childhood, a Beckley man recalled, "a great deal of what we did was Jewish. . . . Family, foods, religious holidays . . . a lot of my religious education was in the home." But the place where his Jewishness was publicly ratified was the temple, site of his bar mitzvah, an important event in his life and, he asserted, in the lives of all the other Jewish boys in town (perhaps even those who thought the process was "a sham"). Most members of the second and third generations participated in local Jewish groups on reaching adulthood. Communal involvement helped them maintain their identity just as it had helped their parents.[113]

The continuity that coalfield Jews succeeded in maintaining had implications after the communities themselves went into decline. In his 1970s study, Frank Anthony Fear noted that young people who left Williamson to live in larger cities were likely to increase their "formal commitment" to Judaism when presented with opportunities to do so, a tendency he attributed to

the influence of their "community of orientation" (the place where they grew up). Recent interviews with Jews who moved away from the region suggest the same thing, with the implications extending even further, to successive generations with no direct experience of the coalfields. One woman mentioned that her granddaughter became Orthodox and took a job with an organization working to revive Jewish life in post-Communist Poland. Recalling her own parents' success in raising their children as Jews despite their inability to maintain Orthodoxy in the tiny town where she grew up, she concluded, "It's a complete circle."[114]

Conclusion

The Jewish communities of the coalfields gathered together people in various stages of the assimilation process. Within the immigrant generation, those who had recently entered the U.S. differed markedly from those who came to the region already acculturated. Among the American-born, those who grew up in the coalfields contrasted with those who arrived after spending their childhoods in large cities. And these, of course, were not the only variables that influenced how and why individuals contributed to Jewish communal life: differences of gender and of generation stand out as two particularly important determinants. Coalfield congregations absorbed and embodied all these disparate elements, from Keystone's B'nai Israel with its *mikvah* and segregated seating to Beckley's Beth El with its organ and non-Jewish choir. Not to mention the diversity *within* each congregation, exemplified by Welch Congregation Emanuel's Orthodox leanings and Easter flowers.

This diversity was far from unusual. Communal life in the region reflected the experience of small town Jewish communities across America in many ways. From a demographic standpoint, however, the coalfield communities may have been among the smallest to create full-fledged

congregational structures. According to Lee Shai Weissbach, "very few places with less than 100 or so Jews supported communal institutions." Organizational efforts in all the coalfield towns began well before the number of Jews reached triple digits. By the time each congregation was officially founded, its population probably hovered around the one hundred mark (except for the Middlesboro and Harlan congregations, which never did reach triple digits). Welch and Logan did not advance far beyond that number and only in Beckley did the Jewish population ever exceed two hundred. If, as most historians suggest, the difficulties in ensuring Jewish continuity increase as the number of Jews gets smaller, then the coalfields provide a classic case of how small town Jews met the challenges posed by their environment to form viable communities that provided a framework to successfully maintain Jewish identity and culture. [115]

In his 1957 study *The Eternal Stranger*, Benjamin Kaplan analyzed a small Louisiana community that did not meet the challenge. "In the last thirty-five years the Jewish people in Opalousas saw their own culture and religious tradition slip away," he reported, as Jews became absorbed into local society. The community's demise resulted not just from small numbers, but from economic imperatives that weakened religious observance, the desire of Jews to conform to social norms, a lack of Jewish education, isolation from the outside Jewish world, and a lack of leadership. Community members lost religious conviction as well as "group pride" (one man told him he saw no basic difference between Judaism and Christianity). Coalfield Jews experienced the same economic and social pressures, but made sure the other factors did not apply to them. They started religious schools when the number of Jewish children in town was as small as five. They sent their children everywhere from the diamond industry in New York City to military school in Chattanooga to expose them to Jews and Jewish culture. And leadership played a key role in enabling their communities to resist the forces of dissolution: from Ida Bank stepping

forward to teach the children of Williamson, to David Scott making sure the Jewish businesses of Welch all closed on the high holidays, to the Orthodox Jews of Logan deciding against their own desires that Reform Judaism would be more likely to reach their children.[116]

The result impressed the two researchers who ventured into the region to study Jewish life in the early 1970s, both, as it happens, in Williamson. Frank Anthony Fear contrasted the community with the findings of researchers in other small towns, stating that in Williamson, "Being a Jew is not a solitary sojourn. There is a tradition of local leadership and members are articulate and educated. The isolated Jew described by [an upstate New York study] hardly exists; they manifest a sense of common identity." Jerome David concluded that Williamsonians were not "marginal," but "rooted" in their Jewishness, unlike many other American Jews. They did not "possess an uncertainty of belongingness" but had "a keen sense of what it means to be Jewish." He also noted that while Jewish religious practice nationally was at a "very low level," this was not the case in Williamson. For comparison, he chose not the few then-existing studies of small town Jews, but the growing body of literature on Jewish suburbanites, the fastest-growing segment of the Jewish population. He contrasted the "total lack of any sense of community," the "loneliness and alienation" that he saw in portrayals of suburbia with the "keen sense of community" he found in Williamson. He attributed the difference, in part, to a small town environment which enabled families to remain close (the husbands, no matter how involved with work, did not commute and were readily accessible); offered fewer distractions; and exhibited greater persistence rates among residents than the high-turnover suburbs.[117]

The two studies' observations about Williamson can be extended to all the coalfield communities. The region's Jews registered the same broad changes that other American Jews went through in the first half of the twentieth century, with a shift away from tradition and

devout religious belief toward a Jewish identity defined by Americanized religious observance, loyalty to family heritage, and cultural affinity with other Jews. In other words, ethnicity assumed a stronger role as religion became less salient. But commitment to Judaism and Jewish culture remained firm. Moreover, commitment to their own small congregations, located in their own small towns, remained a strong force among enough coalfield Jews to enable their communities to last as long as economically feasible. Through the years, some people moved away in order to experience the cultural benefits available in large cities, but not enough to threaten Jewish communal existence. Interviewees for this study, as well as David's and Fear's respondents, revealed why: thriving businesses, the benefits of small town life, a secure place in the social order, satisfaction derived from their participation in the surrounding society, and—not least—the fulfillment afforded by communal involvement all combined to ensure the persistence of Jews in coalfield towns.

The decline of coalfield Jewish communities in the late twentieth century occurred primarily for economic reasons. When David arrived in Williamson in the early 1970s, the process was partially complete. "It saddens one to see this flourishing, vibrant Jewish community slowly die," he commented. "But the age of the small family-owned business is drawing to an end." Parents were not encouraging their children to stay in town. As one person told him, "I don't want to push my children away from home, but I don't want them to come back to live in Williamson. They would return to a non-Jewish existence." As economic factors caused Jewish families to leave, the implications for Jewish community were clear, and generated an additional impetus to Jewish out-migration.[118]

Jewish coalfield residents probably found it easier than non-Jews to move away. Most had links to the outside Jewish world and skills that could be readily transferred. And their roots were

not as deep as those whose families had lived in the region for a much longer period. In 1926, Rabbi Michael Aaronsohn noted the ability of small town Jews to live in two worlds: "When his pioneering days are ended, he is the president of the congregation, he summons a trim, American youth [from HUC] to deliver lectures, he subscribes to the *American Israelite* and the *New York Times*, he 'runs' to New York to shop, . . . his children are enrolled at the leading American colleges, and—presto!—he and his family and all his kin are metropolitans again." Also, there is evidence that Jews did not necessarily consider themselves long-term residents of the region: for one thing, they founded only three cemeteries (in Beckley, in Middlesboro, and the Hebrew Mountain cemetery shared by Jews in the Pocahontas coalfield). Many were buried in nearby Charleston, Bluefield, or Knoxville—or in Baltimore, New York, or Cincinnati.[119]

Coalfield Jews had loyalties that at times must have conflicted: to their local Jewish communities; to the towns where they lived; to family, communities of origin, and other connections outside the region. Their identity as Jews and their identity as residents of their coalfield towns could not always have been easy to reconcile. And there were certainly elements in the surrounding society that added to the difficulty. The following chapter will explore in greater detail the forces that shaped the relationship of Jews to their social milieu, that caused them to function as both "insiders" and "outsiders" in coalfield society.

Notes to Chapter 5

---

[1] Records, B'nai Israel Congregation, Williamson, W.Va. (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Sylvan Bank, phone interview with author, 4 March 1998; Williamson congregation records; Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963), 983-988. Interestingly, most of Ida Bank's speech was quoted verbatim in the Williamson newspaper. "Jewish Women Hold Services," *Mingo Republican*, December 3, 1926.

[4] Leonard Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81 (quote, 43); Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 168; Beth S. Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers," *American Jewish History* 79 (1989-1990): 16-36; Sherry Blanton, "Lives of Quiet Affirmation: The Jewish Women of Early Anniston, Alabama," *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 25-53; Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (New York: Ktav, 1981).

[5] Jerome Paul David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town: A Sociological Study of Jewish Identification" (M.A. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1974), i. Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985, Volume 2* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1991), 207.

[6] Abraham D. Lavender, ed., *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 31; Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews* (New York: Random House, 1971); David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," i.

[7] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Eastern European Era in Jewish History," in *East European Jews in Two Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Manual*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore (Evanston, Ill.: YIVO and Northwestern University Press, 1990), 1-21 (quote, 4); Samuel Kassow, "Communal and Social Change in the Polish Shtetl," in *Jewish Settlement and Community in the Modern Western World*, ed. R. Dotterer, D. Dash Moore, S.M. Cohen (Selinsgrove, Penn.: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 56-92 (quote, 58-59). See also Abraham Ain, "Swislocz: Portrait of a Jewish Community in Eastern Europe," in *East European Jews in Two Worlds*, 22-50; Marc Zborowski and Elisabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952); Isaac Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917* (Jerusalem: Posner & Sons, 1981); Isaac Bashevis Singer, *In My Father's Court* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1962); Joshua Rothenberg, "Demythologizing the Shtetl," *Midstream* (March 1981): 25-30. On the transplantation of *Yiddishkeit* to America, see Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

[8] The most devout Jews did not leave Europe—at least not until the post-1933 era, notes Jeffrey Gurock. "The Orthodox Synagogue," in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 37-84. Of those who did cross the ocean, Steven Hertzberg, among others, contends that individuals who moved beyond New York "were probably more adventurous, independent, and acculturated" than those who remained. *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 78-80. Robert E. Levinson asserts that Jews in the California Gold Rush were less Orthodox, and less bound by the restrictions of the European Jewish community than most Jews. *The Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York: Ktav, 1978).

Hal Rothman provides a cogent account of how Jewish communities in the American West were renewed by fresh arrivals from the old country in "'Same Horse, New Wagon': Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865-1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83-104. As he states, "These newcomers, more closely tied to religious tradition, revived and transformed flagging communities, setting up a characteristic dynamic between the rewards of assimilation and the spiritual, cultural, and ethnic strength of heritage" (84).

[9] See for example Sklare, *America's Jews*. Quote is from Frank Anthony Fear, "The Quest for Saliency: Patterns of Jewish Communal Organization in Three Appalachian Small Towns" (M.A. thesis, West Virginia University, 1972), 27.

[10] Sklare, *America's Jews*, 126.

[11] On Pocahontas: Local historian Jack Jones states, "The Hebrew Congregation was organized in 1892 with Rev. Misisnter (sic) as the first pastor. The present Synagogue was erected in 1912." *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983), 65. (The rabbi's actual name was Mosinter, according to the 1903 *American Jewish Yearbook*.) See also Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 382; "Pocahontas Synagogue Dedicated on Sunday," *McDowell Recorder*, July 4, 1913. On Keystone: Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 983-984, 988; U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census, McDowell County, W.Va., 1900. On Kimball: McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1910; "Synagogue Dedication," *McDowell Recorder*, August 21, 1914; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 989-990.

[12] On Keystone: Louis Zaltzman to Abraham Shinedling (Correspondence 1956, 1957, Abraham I. Shinedling Collection, American Jewish Archives); Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 984, 988. On Pocahontas: Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas*, 65; Edna Moore Drosick, interview with author, Pocahontas, Va., 26 April 1998; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 382. On Kimball: "Synagogue Dedication"; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 989-990.

[13] The land for the Orthodox cemetery on "Hebrew Mountain" was purchased from an African American family named Johnson, who also provided land for an adjoining "colored" cemetery. Most of the graves identified there belong to Jews who lived in Keystone and Pocahontas and it is possible that Jews from other McDowell County towns are buried there as well (not all of those interred could be identified). One African American grave seems to be located within the confines of the Jewish site: that of Cheshire Froe [d. 1910], a Civil War veteran and prominent leader of Keystone's black community. In the 1930s, the region's Jews began to use a much larger cemetery established by the nearby Bluefield congregation in 1929. Today, the Hebrew Mountain site is maintained by Pocahontas resident Tom Childress on behalf of the Bluefield congregation, which inherited responsibility for the old cemetery after the Pocahontas congregation disbanded. Conversations with Edna Drosick and Tom Childress, May 19, 2001; Gail Bank, phone interview with author, 4 October 1998; gravestones, Hebrew Mountain cemetery, Pocahontas, Va.; Bluefield Congregation Ahavath Sholom Fact Sheet (Small Collections, American Jewish Archives); Tazewell County, Va., and McDowell County, W.Va., Manuscript Census, 1900-1920.

In "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262, Lee Shai Weissbach reports that it was common for East European Jews in the small town South to shun the cemeteries established by their German Jewish predecessors (244).

[14] Zaltzman to Shinedling, June 26, 1956; Gail Bank interview. On the transience of small town Orthodox rabbis see Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church," and Louis Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost

Generation': Jewish Religious Life in a Rural Southern Town, 1900-1940," in *Cultural Perspectives on the American South, Vol. 5,* ed. C.R. Wilson (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1991), 45-65. On lay leadership in small town congregations, Rogoff writes, "the prayer leaders were traditionalists who were the most Jewishly literate and observant members of their communities" (56).

[15] Manuscript Census, Tazewell and McDowell Counties, 1900-1920; Milton Koslow, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 13 May 1998; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 366-367, 986, 990; *American Jewish Year Book* 1910; "Dedication of the Jacob Congregation of Kimball," *McDowell Recorder*, August 28, 1914; "Jewish Rabbi Struck by Automobile Thursday," *McDowell Recorder*, April 18, 1919; Records, Congregation Emanuel, Welch, W.Va. (American Jewish Archives).

Orthodox congregations did not often survive in small town America for very long. Those in the coalfield boomtowns (especially in Keystone) must be seen as exceptions. See Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," 259-262.

[16] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 366-367; Manuscript Census, Tazewell and McDowell Counties, 1900-1920; Declaration of Intention and Petition for Naturalization books, McDowell County Courthouse, Welch, W.Va. Citizenship records list Davidov as being from "Pomplani," Borrow from "Kuprelesky," and Teich from "Konstantinov." Towns with similar names are listed either in Nancy Schoenburg and Stuart Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991) or *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1971).

Tobias Schwartz, who served the Pocahontas congregation before 1900, had his rabbinical degree conferred by the famed Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spector, at Kovno (Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 367). Interestingly, historian Lloyd Gartner writes that Rabbi Spector "appears to have exercised patronage in placing numerous rabbis, especially younger men from his *kolel*, in rabbinic positions abroad." From "Jewish Migrants en Route from Europe to North America: Traditions and Realities," in *The Jews of North America*, ed. Moses Rischin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 37.

[17] Manuscript Census, McDowell and Tazewell Counties, 1910.

[18] "Dedication of the Jacob Congregation of Kimball"; "Pocahontas Synagogue Dedicated on Sunday"; *McDowell Recorder* February 24 and March 7, 1911.

[19] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Drosick interview.

[20] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Manuscript Census, McDowell and Mingo Counties, 1910 and 1920. On the attempts of Hebrew Union College to accommodate traditional congregations, see student rabbi correspondence (Series B, Hebrew Union College Collection, American Jewish Archives).

The Bluefield rabbi, though Reform, had experience working with traditional congregants since his own Congregation Ahavath Sholom contained a strong Orthodox contingent. On the high holidays during the 1940s, the Bluefield synagogue hosted Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform services at different times throughout the day. Rabbi Abraham Shinedling, a tireless biographer of Jewish communal life wherever he resided, was the Bluefield congregation's rabbi from 1947 to 1950, when he became the rabbi at Beckley's Temple Beth El. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 370-372.

[21] See chapter 1, note 29, for sources on the origins of coalfield Jews. Kenneth Bank, interview with author, Baltimore, 6 November 1998. The figures do not include the German Jews of Pocahontas, who did not participate in the congregation. Data were insufficient to calculate change over time.

[22] Manuscript Census, Tazewell County, Va., Mingo, Logan, McDowell, Raleigh Counties, W.Va., 1910. Records, Congregation B'nai El Congregation, Logan, W.Va. (American Jewish Archives); Williamson and Welch congregation records; Abraham I. Shinedling and Manuel Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community* (Beckley, W.Va.: Biggs-Johnston-Withrow, 1955).

[23] Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 43; Welch congregation records.

[24] Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 83. Logan, Welch and Williamson congregation records; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936" (Box B-12, Folder 11, Hebrew Union College Collection). Duties of a student rabbi could include working with youth groups, conducting adult education classes, and representing the congregation to the general public (such as speaking at public events and conducting radio broadcasts).

[25] Williamson, Welch congregation records; "Hebrew Aid Society," *McDowell Recorder*, December 12, 1915; "Jewish Congregation Organized," *McDowell Recorder*, April 26,1918; "Work Started on Jewish Synagogue," *McDowell Recorder*, September 15, 1922; Marilou S. Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee," 1963 (unpublished manuscript, Williamson Public Library, Williamson, W.Va.), 89; Lou Mankoff, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., March 1996; Bernard Gottlieb, interview with author, Clarksburg, W.Va., 5 November 1996; Isadore Scott, phone interview with author, 14 December 1997.

[26] Welch congregation records; Scott interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1272; *McDowell Recorder*, 1922-1923. At least five rabbis (all probably non-ordained) passed through Welch during the congregation's early days. As early as 1912, citizenship records in the McDowell County courthouse reveal the residency of twenty-five year old Rabbi Hyman Markowitz, recently arrived in the U.S.

[27] Bernard Gottlieb, Scott interviews; Welch congregation records; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[28] The woman apparently told two untruths here. Orthodox services do not make use of a choir, which was a Reform innovation that echoed Christian practice, and undoubtedly Williamson did not have one. But the congregation did have an accomplished piano player in its midst: Rosa Brown Schwachter. Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough."

[29] Sidney L. Regner, "Experiences While Officiating as a Student at the High Holidays" (Biographies File, American Jewish Archives).

[30] Williamson congregation records; Abraham Feinstein, letter to Henry Englander, February 19, 1924 (Box B-10, Folder 7, Hebrew Union College Collection); Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 92-93.

[31] Williamson congregation records; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1580, 1585, 1591, 1601.

[32] Logan congregation records; Edward Coffman, letter to Kaufmann Kohler, September 18, 1916 (Box B-9, Folder 4, Hebrew Union College Collection); Edward Eiland, "Fact Sheet, B'nai El Congregation" (unpublished document in author's possession); "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936"; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; "Logan—A Big Little City," *West Virginia Review* 5 (November 1927), 73.

[33] Logan congregation records; correspondence, May 1925 to May 1928 (Boxes B-11, B-12, Hebrew Union College Collection); miscellaneous correspondence (Series B, Hebrew Union College Collection).

[34] "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936."

[35] Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 81-86; "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936"; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

[36] Manuel Pickus, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 18 May 1998; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 282; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 127, 82, 84, 86, 109.

[37] Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 110; *Righteous Remnant: Jewish Survival in Appalachia*, video-documentary produced by Maryanne Reed, West Virginia Public Television, 1997.

[38] Leonard Rogoff notes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Orthodoxy was unorganized and Conservative Judaism was in its infancy, "Reform Judaism had developed a national infrastructure" as well as a "mission" to aid small town Jews. These things enabled it to have a significant impact on small town congregations. "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 57.

[39] On the Knoxville Jewish community and its links to the coalfields, see Wendy Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

[40] Bell County, Ky., Manuscript Census, 1900-1920; "Middlesboro History" column, *Middlesboro Daily News*, February 22, 1990; Melvin Sturm, phone interview with author, 4 October 1998; "Jewish Cemetery, Middlesboro, Kentucky" (Middlesboro, Ky., Folder, Small Collections, American Jewish Archives.)

[41] "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936"; "Middlesboro History Column," March 13, November 10 and 16, 1990; Goldie Scott Jaffe, phone interview with author, 30 April 2000; Sturm interview; Esther Sturm Baloff, interview with Barbara Winick Bernstein and Marilyn Jacob Shore, 20 May 1985, Knoxville Jewish Community Archives Project, Knoxville Jewish Federation, Knoxville, Tennessee.

[42] In 1921 Weinstein actually requested that the Reform seminary send someone to conduct Orthodox services. The school politely informed him that all their student rabbis were already engaged. "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936"; letters from Sam Weinstein, David Scott, and Euster Bros. to Hebrew Union College (Box B-9, Folder 2; Box B-10, Folders 2 and 3; Box B-11, Folders 4 and 9, Hebrew Union College Collection); Baloff, Jaffe, Sturm interviews.

[43] "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936"; Baloff, Jaffe, Sturm interviews. Records, B'nai Sholom Congregation, Harlan, Ky. (American Jewish Archives).

[44] Harlan congregation records. Members lived in Evarts, Cumberland, Pineville, Middlesboro, Corbin, Barbourville, Hazard, Neon, and Jenkins, Ky.; Norton, Appalachia, and Pennington Gap, Va.; and LaFollette, Tenn.

[45] Harlan congregation records; Sturm, Jaffe, Baloff interviews.

[46] Rabbi Michael Aaronsohn, "Coal, Cotton, and Congregations," 1926. Quoted in Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 75-77.

[47] Jean Abrams Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996. For the derivation of the 90 percent figure, see chapter 3.

[48] Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 2, 158, 168.

[49] Emanuel Katzen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Princeton, W.Va., 30 May 1996; ; Betty Ofsa Rosen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., 28 May 1996; Baloff, Jaffe interviews. Many other accounts of small town American Jewry have noted the family-economic ties that cemented Jewish communities. See for example Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South"; Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon.'" Sources used to establish the kinship networks of coalfield Jews included: interviews, census records, newspaper wedding announcements.

[50] Congregation Emanuel founders' plaque, McDowell County library, Welch, W.Va.; Williamson congregation records; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 84.

[51] Sidney Fink, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 12 October 1996; Sam and Harvey Weiner, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 8 November 1996; Jaffe, Pickus, Jean Abrams Wein interviews; "Goodman-Lopinsky," *McDowell Recorder*, February 12, 1915; "Wagner-Totz Wedding Brilliant Affair," *McDowell Recorder*, April 7, 1922; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*, 91.

[52] *McDowell Recorder*, February 24, 1911; Reva Totz Hecker, interview with author, Baltimore, 5 November 1998. Historians have noted how the strong links between small town Jews and urban centers gave crucial support to their communities. Hal Rothman states that "Most of the businesses in Wichita were extensions of other family enterprises elsewhere. . . . A pattern of family and kinship-oriented endeavor that extended over great distance" helped the town's Jewish community to flourish. "'Same Horse, New Wagon'," 87. Leonard Rogoff describes small North Carolina Jewish communities as "colonial outposts of Richmond, Baltimore, [etc.]" and observes that "Despite their distance and isolation, small-town Jews remained networked to the city where—in addition to wholesale merchandise—they found spouses, rabbis, and prayer books." "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 52-53.

[53] Ira Sopher, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*, 259; Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia*. See chapter 3 for a fuller description of mutual economic assistance (and economic competition) within coalfield Jewish communities.

[54] The *Middlesboro News* history column in 1990 quoted announcements of Jewish store closings in 1914, 1926, and 1933. The 1926 notice stated that "All the stores in the city will be closed today." See also "Attention Called to Jewish Holidays," *McDowell Recorder*, September 15, 1922. Bernard Gottlieb, Sturm, Scott, Ira Sopher interviews.

[55] Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 22. See also Lee Shai Weissbach, "Stability and Mobility in the Small Jewish Community: Examples from Kentucky History," *American Jewish History* 79 (Spring 1990): 355-375; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation'"; Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Sorin, *A Time for Building*. Morawska notes that the "traditionally sanctioned cooperation of the rural Christian population, who were accustomed to the cessation of trade on Saturdays" made Jewish Sabbath observance possible (155). Jews in large U.S. cities had to conform to American work patterns, but the existence of an internal Jewish economy enabled many to continue Sabbath observance.

[56] Isadore Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 16, 34; Baloff interview.

[57] McDowell County Circuit Court records, McDowell County Courthouse; *West Virginia Supreme Court Reports*, 1908, 1914, 1917, 1920, 1922 (quote, 1922, p. 722). In a McDowell County court proceeding, Bessie Zaltzman explained, "Mr. Crigger is mad at me because I make him give me up my money; he sold me a sick cow . . . and I make him pay me back my money. . . . and Mrs. Crigger she buy copper and brass and I find in her place my copper kettle my mother give me from the old country and I make her give it up and she is mad with me."

[58] Williamson, Harlan congregation records.

[59] A 1953 survey of small-town Jews confirms the view from the coalfields: in both growing and declining Jewish communities, respondents reported that the economic situation was the major determining factor in whether young people tended to remain or leave. Robert Shosteck, *Small-Town Jewry Tell Their Story: Survey of B'nai B'rith Membership in Small Communities in the United States and Canada* (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Vocational Service, 1961 [1953]), 50.

[60] Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'," 84; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Folk Culture of Jewish Immigrant Communities," in *The Jews of North America*, 79-94 (quote, 89); Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 169, 183.

Works that focus on the loss of Jewish tradition include Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, 1820-1870 (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press); Neil M. and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *Our Parents' Lives: The Americanization of Eastern European Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Jenna Weissman Joselit, "'Merry Chanuka': The Changing Holiday Practices of American Jews, 1880-1950," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church"; Weissbach, "East Europeans and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South"; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation.'" Jick, Rothman, and Weissbach also pay much attention to how traditions survived. On the latter see also Arthur A. Goren, "Traditional Institutions Transplanted," in *The Jews of North America*, 62-78; and Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*.

[61] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Folk Culture of Jewish Immigrant Communities," 89; Sklare, *America's Jews*, 28, 125; Lavender, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 34. See also Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community* (New York: Bookman, 1957).

[62] Martha Albert, interview with author, Williamson, W.Va., 8 November, 1996; Edward Eiland, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 19 May 1998; Christine Carr McGuire, phone interview with author, November 1998; Ken Bank, Mankoff, Pickus, Koslow, Baloff interviews; Logan, Welch, Harlan, Williamson congregation records; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 43; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 74.

[63] Isadore Wein, Koslow interviews; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 67.

[64] Jeffrey Gurock, "The Orthodox Synagogue," 52; Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 190. See also Marcus, *United States Jewry, Volume 2*, 199; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation'," 56; Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," 244. Bertie Rodgin Cohen, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 6 March 2000; Jaffe, Gail Bank interviews.

In *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, Leon Jick asserts that "lax Orthodoxy," which combined compromise (dictated by necessity) with a lingering attachment to tradition, characterized both German and East European Jewish immigrants. The perception that German immigrants were committed to Reform Judaism, he says, is false. By the time the East Europeans arrived, the Germans were already acculturated, second or third generation American Jews whose embrace of Reform derived from their American experience, not from anything they brought over from Germany. Most of the East Europeans (or rather, their descendants), after going through a similar acculturation process, would also move from "lax Orthodoxy" to more Americanized forms. However, as Arthur Goren notes, their "intensive religious culture" enabled them to transplant and retain more of their traditional practices than the Germans did. "Traditional Institutions Transplanted," 70.

[65] Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon'," 94; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Folk Culture of Jewish Immigrant Communities," 89; Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 100, 157.

[66] Commentators assign different weight to these various motivations. Kaplan in *The Eternal Stranger* emphasizes religious belief while Theodore Lowi highlights family loyalty in "Southern Jews: The Two Communities," *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 265-282. Jacob Rader Marcus talks about a "common ethic" and shared culture (*United States Jewry, Volume 2*, 200) while Marshall Sklare delves into psychological factors (*America's Jews*, 26-33). Recent theorists such as Sander L. Gilman focus on identity formation; see "The Jewish Nose: Are the Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. L. J. Silberstein and R. L. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 364-401. On children see Sklare, 115-116.

[67] Harlan congregation records; "Jewish Women Hold Services"; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 23-24, 94.

[68] Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*; Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1976); Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*; Blanton, "Lives of Quiet Affirmation"; Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman*; Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: The Synagogue Sisterhood, 1890-1940," in Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, 206-230; William Toll, "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920," *American Jewish Archives* 41 (Spring/Summer 1989): 7-26.

[69] Bernard Gottlieb, Hecker, Jean Abrams Wein, Baloff interviews. In "Diamond in the Rough," 83, Marilou Schwachter Sniderman reports that when her older brother started to date, her father did not seem concerned about the possibility of intermarriage. But her mother (who had grown up in Williamson) exclaimed, "a *shikseh* for a daughter-in-law! Never!"

Memoirs from other times and places describe the same pattern of women holding onto tradition longer than men. Mary Antin, in her celebrated memoir *The Promised Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), contrasts the piety of her mother to the relative indifference toward religion displayed by her father. By the time he arranged for his wife and children to come from the old country, he had lived in Boston for several years and had embraced American opportunity, displaying the lax Orthodoxy of American Jews. His wife remained devout, attached to tradition, and determined to maintain a traditional Jewish lifestyle. See also Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998). Paula Hyman comments on the traditionalism of women in industrializing societies in *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, 22.

[70] Koslow, Katzen, Fink, Bernard Gottlieb, Jean Abrams Wein, Hecker, Mankoff interviews; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 34.

Two reminiscences from just beyond the coalfields shed light on how some merchants came to be *schochtim*. In a letter to Abraham Shinedling, a woman who came with her husband to Greenbrier County in 1916 explained how the process worked: "My husband learned to be a schochet only so that we might have meat in Marlinton. He studied (if that is the term) briefly in Baltimore after our marriage . . . and only enough to ritually slaughter for his own family. He did, however, kill chickens for the other families for the holidays" (Sara Schuchat to Shinedling, Miscellaneous Correspondence, Shinedling Collection). A 1974 Virginia memoir, "Jewish Heritage of the Winchester Community," contains a similar recollection (Small Collections, American Jewish Archives).

[71] Mankoff interview; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 34, 93, 23, 36, 35. As a man who grew up in Northfork joked, "Take the food out of religion and the religion may fall apart." The phenomenon of "kitchen Judaism" as an important component of ethnic identity has been discussed by many authors. See for example Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 158. Marcie Cohen Ferris observes that foodways express both tradition and acculturation; she traces how Southern Jewish women mixed customs from the old country with the foodways of the American South. "From the Recipe File of Luba Cohen: A Study of Southern Jewish Foodways and Cultural Identity," *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 129-164. This can be seen in the coalfields, as in Marilou Sniderman's recollection of her family's "traditional" Sunday breakfast of fried apples and country-cured ham.

[72] In Logan, controversy did erupt when women tried to move their role from behind the scenes to right out in front, asking to be recognized as members of the congregation entitled to seats on the board. The February 1925 minutes of the congregation, kept by secretary Harry Stern, read as follows:

> [The Sisterhood ladies said they] wanted to become members of our congregation and assist us in our work. They could not state how they could benefit us. This brought up considerable discussion pro and con with the result that it was decided to table this matter . . . until the Sisterhood could bring someone here who would be able to tell us more clearly the benefits of having the ladies of the Jewish community as active members of the B'nai El Congregation.

The men's response shows not only that there were boundaries women still could not cross, but that their previous contributions had gone unrecognized. The women knew what to do about this, however. The following month the minutes note that the community seder normally held every year had been canceled, since "it would work a hardship on the ladies." After that, the minutes record increased consultation with the Sisterhood on matters such as taking care of visiting rabbis and renting a permanent space to hold services. The men did not accept the official membership of the women, but voted to have joint meetings with the Sisterhood board on "matters of importance." Logan congregation records, 1925.

[73] Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism," 17; Joselit, "The Special Sphere"; Toll, "A Quiet Revolution"; Blanton, "Lives of Quiet Affirmation." Jacob Rader Marcus asserts, "it cannot be overemphasized: the synagogue—the Jewish community, too—was, and still is, dependent upon women" (*The American Jewish Woman*, 777). On the "feminization" of religious life in America and other Western societies, see especially Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*.

One clue that women did not themselves realize the radical nature of their foray into new gender territory was that they continued to refer to themselves by their husbands' names in their records. For the historian,

some detective work is needed to discover that "Mrs. Hyman Bank" was really Ida. Sherry Blanton notes the same phenomenon in her study of the women of Anniston.

[74] Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism," 21. Congregation records, Logan, Williamson, Harlan, Welch. Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*.

[75] Congregation records; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Weiner, Hecker interviews; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 4.

[76] Much of traditional Jewish practice takes place in a communal context, with many rituals requiring a *minyan* of ten men. *Tzedekah* and mutual aid, key components of the religion, can only be carried out within communities. On the need for community to be Jewish, see Sklare, *America's Jews*, 46; Marcus, *United States Jewry, Volume 2*, 207. "Jewish Women Hold Services."

[77] Sklare, *America's Jews*, 123-125; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 59, and "Small Town Orthodoxy, Southern Style" (paper presented at the Southern Jewish Historical Society annual meeting, New Orleans, 1995), 15; Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger*, 108, 126-127; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation'"; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*. On high affiliation rates in small towns see also Lavender, *A Coat of Many Colors*, 8.

[78] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 18-20; Sylvan Bank, Mankoff, Koslow, Bernard Gottlieb, Ira Sopher, Pickus, Albert, Katzen, Jean Abrams Wein, Eiland interviews.

[79] Ken Bank, Koslow, Pickus, Fink interviews; Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 99; Harlan congregation records.

[80] Congregation records; "Jewish Relief Fund Gets Results," *McDowell Recorder*, January 28, 1916; "Relief Committee," *McDowell Recorder*, October 25, 1918; Daniel Soyer, "Between Two Worlds: The Jewish *Landsmanshaftn* and Questions of Immigrant Identity," *American Jewish History* 76 (September 1986): 5-24 (quote, 6).

[81] Congregation records; Pickus interview. In *The Joys of Yiddish* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), Leo Rosten writes about the *pushke*, the little can or box "kept in the home, often in the kitchen, in which money to be donated to charity is accumulated. . . . Jewish housewives customarily put a few coins in the *pushke* every Friday night, before lighting the Sabbath candles" (296). Travelers' aid and matzo funds derived directly from Europe. See Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People*, 193-205.

[82] Congregation records; Jaffe, Sturm interviews; *American Jewish Year Book* 1916; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 44-45.

[83] "Pocahontas Synagogue Dedicated on Sunday," *McDowell Recorder*, March 7, 1911; Williamson congregation records; Welch congregation records; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*.

The speaker at the Pocahontas dedication was Edward Calisch, a Reform rabbi who took a particular interest in far-flung Jewish communities and devoted much energy to encouraging their religious development. In 1900 he wrote an article on "The Country Jew, and the Efforts Made to Reach Him," in a Baltimore-based Jewish journal. (Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church"). One wonders what the ardent reformer thought of the new Pocahontas synagogue's traditional *mikvah* and separate seating for women. The rabbi also spoke at the dedication of Williamson's B'nai Israel synagogue in 1928.

[84] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 23, 5; Alton Winters to Shinedling (Correspondence 1957, Shinedling Collection); Weiner interview; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1291. Some trainees went on to achieve prominence. In addition to Petuchowski there was Williamson student rabbi Alex Schindler, who headed the Reform movement from the 1970s into the 1990s.

[85] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 86, 24-25; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 63; Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 147, 165; Jean Abrams Wein, Ken Bank, Fink, Pickus, Baloff interviews. Stated Nathan Bark, Williamson student rabbi in 1953, "The youth group was small but active and never missed a conclave. The same was true of Sisterhood" (Correspondence 1957, Shinedling Collection).

[86] Congregation records; Albert, Sylvan Bank, Eiland, Pickus, Jean Abrams Wein, Katzen, Bernard Gottlieb interviews; Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 99-100.

[87] Koslow, Katzen, Albert, Sylvan Bank, Eiland, Pickus, Jean Abrams Wein, Bernard Gottlieb, Scott interviews; Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, interview with author, Parkersburg, W.Va., 18 December 1997; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town"; congregation records.

[88] Rogoff, "Small Town Orthodoxy, Southern Style," 9; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 52; congregation records; Sturm interview; *McDowell Recorder*, August 4, 1922. See Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," 246-247, on the perpetuation of Yiddish culture in small southern towns.

[89] Congregation records; Bruce Ehrmann to Shinedling (Miscellaneous Correspondence, Shinedling Collection); Jaffe, Baloff, Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, Albert interviews. *McDowell Recorder* articles: "Minyen Club Entertained Last Sunday," March 24, 1922; "Birthday Party," October 17, 1913; "Gave Delightful Party," August 11, 1911; "Young Folks Entertained," July 20, 1917; "Mr. and Mrs. Herzbrun Celebrate 35th Anniversary," December 5, 1919.

[90] Koslow interview; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 92.

[91] Edward Cohen, *The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Besmann, *A Separate Circle*; Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation'"; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church"; Evans, *The Provincials*; John Shelton Reed, "Shalom, Y'All: Jewish Southerners," in *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 111; Scott interview.

[92] Pickus, Eiland, Ira Sopher interviews; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 78.

[93] Gilman, "The Jewish Nose," 365; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Folk Culture of Jewish Immigrant Communities," 87. On the multiple identities of southern Jews, see Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

[94] Sklare, *America's Jews*, 28; Sorin, *A Time for Building*, 168.

[95] As Jerome David put it, "the Christian influence is pervasive" in Williamson, and this was true for the entire region. "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 44. Chapter 6 will focus on how Jews dealt with issues surrounding Christianity.

[96] Baloff interview; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 52, 87. Jews in county seat towns tended to live near each other. A desire to be close to their downtown businesses and to the synagogue (many insisted on walking) might have been the main reasons. But in at least one town, Beckley, there was also a hint that some form of social segregation was at work, partly (but not entirely) self-imposed. Some referred to the neighborhood around the temple as "Little Jerusalem."

[97] Hecker, Gail Bank interviews; McDowell County Manuscript Census, 1920; Mary Marsh Ofsa, phone interview with author, 26 March 1999.

[98] Congregation records; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 60.

[99] Beckley's unconventional rabbi Isadore Wein went so far as to say that intermarriages "have been a big help to the community." By the 1990s, most of the remaining Beckley congregants were intermarried and the congregation could not survive without them. Moreover, he added, "the women who come into Judaism are much better observers of Judaism than our Jewish girls." Congregation records; Hecker, Gail Bank interviews; "Student Rabbi Survey, 1935-1936"; Bruce Ehrmann to Shinedling (Miscellaneous Correspondence, Shinedling Collection); David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 58-62; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*; Mary Jo Sopher, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996.

The reactions of coalfield Jews to intermarriage were similar to those in small towns around the nation. On intermarriage within American Jewish communities, see Sklare, *America's Jews*, 180-203.

[100] Ira Sopher, Weiner, Drosick interviews; Mrs. Milton Gottlieb to Shinedling (Correspondence 1956, Shinedling Collection); *American Jewish Yearbook* 1916-1917; Will Books, Mingo and McDowell Counties.

[101] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 79.

[102] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 46, 90-91; Williamson congregation records.

[103] Scott interview; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church," 48.

[104] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 48; Scott interview. See Reed, "Shalom, Y'All"; Evans, *The Provincials*; and Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church" on the effect of a high level of church participation on southern Jews.

[105] Sklare, *America's Jews*, 114; Marcus, *United States Jewry, Volume 2*, 235-236, 333; Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church"; Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman"; Goren, "Traditional Institutions Transplanted."

[106] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 4; congregation records, Williamson and Welch; Marcus, *United States Jewry, Volume 2*, 197. On the transformation of ladies aid societies into Sisterhoods, see Joselit, "The Special Sphere," and Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism."

[107] Rothman, "'Same Horse, New Wagon',"100; Williamson congregation records. Given that Easter in the old country was a time of special danger for Jews, this small detail from the Williamson record provides a striking example of differences between life in Eastern Europe and the U.S.

[108] Marcus, *United States Jewry, Volume 2*, 199; Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, 150; Rogoff "Small Town Orthodoxy, Southern Style," 10; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation'," 57; Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 180-183; Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," 256-257. See also Gurock, "The Orthodox Synagogue," 52. For a vivid account of generational problems in transmitting Judaism in small towns, see Schmier's essay.

[109] Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 181-183, 261-263; Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South"; Schmier, "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation'"; Rogoff, "Small Town Orthodoxy, Southern Style."

[110] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 15; Ken Bank interview.

[111] Williamson, Welch, Logan congregation records; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 16-17; Eiland interview.

[112] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 17, 34, 98.

[113] Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, Pickus interviews; Williamson, Logan, Welch congregation records; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*; Shinedling and Pickus, *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*.

[114] Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 100-101; Scott, Betty Schuchat Gottlieb interviews.

[115] Lee Shai Weissbach, "Small Town Jewish Life and the Pennsylvania Pattern," *Western Pennsylvania History* 83 (Spring 2000): 37-53 (quote, 40).

[116] Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger*, 96, 108.

[117] Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 157-158; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 11, 30, 92.

[118] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 96, 98; Simon Meyer, *One Hundred Years: An Anthology of Charleston Jewry* (Charleston, W.Va.: Jones Printing Co., 1972). William Toll notes how the changing American economy fostered a general decline in Jewish communal life: "Structural changes in Jewish employment have been strongest since the 1950s, and these shifts are probably more responsible than any other [reason]. . . . The economic base that sustained a prior, more stable culture has evaporated." In "The 'New Social History' and Recent Jewish Historical Writing," *American Jewish History*, 325-341 (quote, 341). Jobs became increasingly mobile as small family businesses gave way to employment with large corporations. With economic life no longer rooted in particular communities (whether in large cities or small towns), communal life suffered.

[119] Aaronsohn, "Coal, Cotton, and Congregations," quoted in Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 75.

Chapter 6

Insiders and Outsiders: Race, Religion, and Politics in the Coalfields

At the 1928 ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of Williamson, West Virginia's synagogue, congregation president Harry Schwachter directed his remarks to the gentiles in the crowd:

> The building of this temple will prove to you our permanency. It will show the community that we are not interlopers and we did not come for the purpose of "filling our bags and baggage," but rather to live with you, work with you, and serve with you to the end of time. A handful of Jewish people have found a veritable haven in this community.

Jews had maintained a continuous presence in Williamson since the town's founding more than thirty years before. Their early arrival, a regard for their entrepreneurial contribution, and the newness and diversity of the population had eased their incorporation into the town's middle class. They had already helped advance Williamson's commercial and civic development as merchants and residents, and would continue to do so for decades to come. Their commercial niche had enabled their numbers to grow; their decision to build a synagogue indicated their confidence that, from an economic, communal-religious, and social standpoint, the town offered them a decent future. As Marilou Schwachter Sniderman wrote of her father's speech almost forty years after the ceremony, "His words were absolutely true, and were carried out. The same twenty families who started the temple, or their descendants, are still there, building better relations in a struggling community. They have remained loyal to a little town that has had its ups and downs."[1]

And yet, Schwachter's words reveal an underlying tension, a hint of insecurity. Why did the Jews have something to "prove?" Where and how had the insinuation arisen that they were

"interlopers?" Was this an imaginary reproach made by imaginary gentiles, part of Schwachter's inheritance of centuries-old Jewish distrust of non-Jews, or his own absorption of longstanding anti-semitic stereotypes? Or did it emanate from his coalfield environment? His daughter interprets: "Sounds as if pappy were still smarting a little over that 'damn Jew' remark, and was out to prove a point" (see chapter 5). But the usually-optimistic Schwachter was not the only one to express doubts about the standing of Jews in coalfield society. Interviews with people who grew up in the region, newspaper articles, and other sources also expose ambiguities and contradictions in Jewish-gentile relations and in the attitude of the larger society toward its Jewish minority.[2]

To adequately explore these ambiguities, to situate Jews within the coalfield social milieu, and to attempt to capture the complexities of Jewish-gentile relations, it is necessary to consider the dynamics of class, ethnicity, and race that shaped *all* social relations in the larger coalfield context. Ethnic diversity within a "boomtown environment" fostered multicultural cooperation and toleration, but also offered scope for ethnic strife, nativism, and racism. And despite the many factors that led to their high degree of integration, despite being just one of many different coalfield minorities, Jews occupied ground that can only be described as anomalous: as middle-class, commercial-oriented town dwellers among a predominantly working-class, rural population; as non-participants in the single industry that employed almost everyone else; as bystanders in a region often wracked with violent labor-management conflict; and, of course, as non-Christians in an overwhelmingly Christian environment. These distinctions not only marked their own sense of identity, they also affected the way Jews interacted with others and influenced the way others viewed and treated them.

Diversity, Conflict, and Accommodation

As rail lines spread through the Central Appalachian plateau, the region's absentee land corporations moved promptly to develop their coal reserves, leasing their property to coal companies and pressing for immediate production. To overcome a severe shortage of labor in the thinly-populated mountains, coal operators quickly imported workers from beyond the region. They sent labor agents south to recruit African Americans, thus bringing racial diversity to the virtually all-white plateau.[3] They also turned to the eastern seaports, where immigrants seeking jobs were landing daily in massive numbers. Coal operators came to embrace the notion of a heterogeneous workforce since they believed that a "judicious mixture" of ethnic and racial groups would enhance their control over their workers and "forestall unionism by playing one group off against another," as historian Ken Bailey puts it. By 1908, the mining workforce in seven coal counties in southern West Virginia and Virginia was 41 percent native white, 31 percent black, and 28 percent foreign-born.[4]

But patterns of ethnic diversity varied within the region, depending on the timing and pace of each coalfield's development. The Pocahontas coalfield (McDowell and Mercer counties in West Virginia plus Pocahontas, Virginia) opened early in the coal boom, developed faster than the other southern coalfields, and began with the smallest preindustrial population. Thus, its coal operators had the greatest need to import labor. McDowell County experienced the region's greatest population growth before 1920 and became by far the most ethnically diverse coal county. Its mining workforce in 1908 was 43 percent black, 29 percent foreign-born, and 28 percent native white, while its general population in 1910 was 31 percent black, 17 percent immigrants or children of immigrants, and only 52 percent native white.[5] In contrast, the Harlan coalfield in southeastern Kentucky began to develop when the railroad arrived around 1910,

more than twenty years after the Pocahontas field. By that time, miners could be recruited from surrounding areas, enabling the population to retain "a remarkable homogeneity," according to one historian. Yet Harlan County did see an influx of immigrants and blacks as its population tripled between 1910 and 1920. Its number of foreign-born rose during that decade from twelve to twelve hundred (4 percent of the total population), yet dwindled thereafter. By 1930 county residents were 90 percent native white, 9 percent black, and 1 percent foreign-born. Other counties in the late-developing eastern Kentucky coalfields were even more homogeneous, but since those counties had little or no Jewish population, they are not included in this study.[6]

In fact, there was a direct correlation between the heterogeneity of a county in the early years of the coal boom and the number of Jews who settled there. The more diverse the county's population, the larger its Jewish population (though Jews themselves had little statistical effect on the demographic makeup).[7] McDowell County had the largest number of blacks *and* the largest number of Jews in the coalfields into the 1920s, as well as the smallest percentage of native whites. Perhaps this correlation between Jews and other "outside" groups existed simply because the most heterogeneous counties were those that had experienced the greatest population growth and thus offered the most opportunity for merchants. But other factors might have contributed as well. Because population diversity generally results in a climate more open to Jews, it might have been easier for them to get established. Also, although Jewish immigrants did not serve a specifically East European or black clientele as they did in other parts of America, their familiarity with East European languages and customs may have encouraged some to settle and open businesses alongside their former neighbors.[8]

Most coalfield counties where Jews settled had diversity patterns that fell somewhere between those of Harlan and McDowell. Immigrants, blacks, and native whites crowded into

hastily-built company towns across the region, while some of the new arrivals—workers skilled and unskilled as well as entrepreneurs and a few professionals—moved to the budding commercial centers to contribute to an ethnically mixed town population (though county seats were never as diverse as coal mining towns). Hungarians made up the largest foreign group in the Pocahontas coalfield, while Italians outstripped others in the New River area. These were the two largest immigrant groups overall, with Poles and Slovaks next. Others included Germans, Austrians, Bohemians, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovenians, Croatians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, English, Welsh, Irish, and Scotch.[9]

The immigrant population peaked early, however. World War I caused the departure of thousands of foreign nationals called back to serve in the armies of their homelands. In the 1920s, national immigration laws halted the influx of new arrivals from Southern and Eastern Europe. Economic downturns in the following decades saw blacks and immigrants leave the coalfields in greater percentages than natives. With disproportionate losses among these groups, by the late twentieth century the region had become, statistically, more homogeneous than it had been since the dawn of the century. Yet these trends obscure the legacy of immigrants and blacks. For one thing, the native-born children of immigrants who remained in the region do not show up in statistics. While this second generation largely blended into coalfield society, the society they blended into was in many ways a "polyglot culture," forged during the height of the coal boom, which enabled them to retain aspects of their religious and cultural heritage.[10]

The region's immigrants, blacks, and native whites went through a similar process of adjustment to American industrial life as their urbanizing counterparts in the rest of the nation. "Mining towns were the rural equivalents of the ethnic ghettos which served as transitional communities for foreign immigrants in the cities," states Ronald L. Lewis. Doug Cantrell and

Margaret Ripley-Wolfe describe the communal institutions, traditions, and adaptations of East Europeans and Italians, from the maintenance of ethnic boarding houses and fraternal clubs to the use of the padrone system to the celebration of feast days. Joe Trotter offers a detailed look at the churches, mutual aid associations, and communal events that shaped African American life in southern West Virginia. Religious institutions played an important role for all the new groups; the Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and black Protestant churches that soon dotted the region provided a visible marker of coalfield diversity. Meanwhile, native mountaineers and other southern whites, displaced from farms to coal camps, underwent their own process of adjustment, and, like the others, relied on preindustrial customs and survival strategies to make the transition. Communal structures and traditions helped members of all these groups deal with the challenges they encountered in their new homes, enabling them to "adapt their peasant origins to industrial life in the coal camps," as Cantrell states. Thus, multicultural expression flourished, and aided in the process of assimilation and Americanization.[11]

In this context, coalfield Jews were simply one more group engaged in the project of adapting to a new environment while attempting to maintain continuity with the past. Their communal activities paralleled those of other groups; Ripley-Wolfe, for example, discusses how Italians in Wise County, Virginia, attached special significance to celebrating religious holidays and marking life cycle events. Their institutions performed similar mediating functions; the Catholic Ladies Society of Harlan County described by Cantrell sounds not unlike the Jewish women's groups that organized communal life while interacting with the broader society. Jews experienced the same tension between preserving their heritage and assimilating, and dealt with it in comparable ways; Yvonne Farley documents a combination of religious conviction and compromise among the Lebanese community of Beckley, West Virginia, that reflects strategies

that the town's Jewish congregation evolved for balancing the old and the new.[12]

To different degrees, the immigrant groups assimilated into a coalfield society that represented a blend of rural southern cultural patterns (and their mountain variations), the new ideologies and rhythms of industrialization, and the influences of the new arrivals themselves.[13] Daily interaction resulted in a certain amount of incidental cultural fusion as diverse customs spread beyond individual ethnic groups to touch a larger circle of neighbors and friends. Jewish adults and children invited non-Jewish friends to Passover and Chanukah celebrations; a non-Jewish woman recalled that her father's good friend taught him to speak Yiddish. One gentile woman who married a Jewish man continued to prepare her mother-in-law's recipe for matzo ball soup late into the twentieth century.[14]

Most observers of coalfield life assert that immigrant cultural practices disappeared as members of the second and third generation became absorbed into their surroundings. Yet the various religious and ethnic traditions brought into the region did not completely vanish as years passed. From houses of worship to foodways, coalfield residents felt free to maintain and integrate elements of their pre-migration culture into their new homes, and these customs continued to color life in the region.[15]

Even though members of the various coalfield groups developed a "polyglot culture" while engaging in the shared task of adapting to a new life, conflict rather than camaraderie at first marked their relations. In the early years of the coal boom, all inhabitants of the region—from native mountaineers to newcomers of all sorts—found themselves in a time of rapid, confusing, often wrenching transformation which was exacerbated by harsh conditions in the coal mines and camps as well as by an exploitative economic system that pitted workers against each other

as well as against the local elite. Such a setting offered fertile ground for nativism and racism to flourish, for people from all backgrounds to project their anxieties, confusion, and fear onto an all-to-handy "other," and for cross-cultural misunderstanding to lead to discord and violence.

Coalfield historians are unanimous in stressing the racial and ethnic friction that accompanied the early phase of industrialization. Prejudice against blacks and foreigners was "a part of everyday life," with racism "far more virulent" than nativism. Both groups faced discrimination. Company housing segregated miners into sections whose names—such as "Niggertown," "Hunkieville," and "Tallie Holler"—clearly expressed the lower status of their inhabitants. West Virginia, where most coalfield blacks settled, did not have the full complement of Jim Crow laws, yet segregation was mandated by law in education and marriage and was customary in other areas as well. The coal operators' "judicious mixture" policy at first worked well, as animosities flared among miners when some groups were seen by others as bringing down wages, breaking strikes, or taking over better jobs. "Nativism reared its head particularly in times of labor strife," notes Ken Bailey. Cultural differences intensified ethnic tensions. States Randall Lawrence, "immigrants . . . had manners, customs, and languages altogether unfamiliar and often frightening to mountaineers and Blacks," provoking a wide range of reactions: "immigrants amused, astonished, and threatened mountaineers and Blacks in the course of everyday life." These dynamics, especially under the rough-and-tumble conditions that pertained before World War I, caused the coalfield melting pot to "boil over into violence" between members of the various groups, according to Ronald Lewis.[16]

Ethnic antagonism was not confined to the working class. Coalfield newspapers, the voice of the local elite, also aimed their bigotry at foreigners and blacks. Asserts Lawrence, "The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* . . . consistently portrayed immigrants as ignorant, dirty, and prone to

drinking." Yet, well aware of the importance of black and immigrant labor to the region's prosperity, editors set a tone of amusement and patronizing derision rather than outright hostility. Local journalists delighted in celebrating "the bizarre and unusual among the foreign and Black population," says Margaret Ripley-Wolfe. For example, a 1901 *Fayette Journal* article went into great detail about court proceedings involving a financial dispute among local Assyrians:

> The first hitch occurred when Attorney Nuckolls insisted that the Mohamedan oath be administered the witnesses, all of whom believed in the prophet Mohamet. All of the turks wanted to talk at once and did so, throwing the court into an uproar and the idea had to be abandoned. . . . [The interpreter] became angered on the stand and was rushed from the court room, but was pacified and brought back by his countrymen. . . . It is said that the defendants will have the interpreter indicted for perjury.

Articles such as these were meant to give native white readers a chuckle, while alleviating fears about the "foreign element" in their midst by pointing out the essential inferiority of these new arrivals. Other articles dwelt on the propensity of non-native-white groups to fight amongst themselves and kill each other for seemingly no reason—or, more threateningly (but less frequently), highlighted the "savage" attacks committed by foreigners against native whites.[17]

The African American-owned *McDowell Times* offers an antidote to such portrayals. Although it was biased in its own way, a more balanced picture of the region's ethnic violence emerges from reading its pages. One 1913 article described a "Near Riot in Anawalt," with a white mob chasing an Italian home after a bar fight and injuring his wife in the ensuing melee. The mob was led by the town's police chief, who arrested the Italian. Leading black citizens went to city hall to examine the man in the interest of "preserving order and learning the truth." He was eventually released when the local coal company superintendent intervened, stating that "he was one of the best workers and most peaceable men employed on his job." The article

castigated "lawless white brutes," neatly echoing the language directed against blacks in the region's other newspapers. The *Times* did not hesitate to print articles concerning the misdeeds of immigrants, but presented a slightly more nuanced view than white newspapers. For example, a story about an attack by five Italians on a white railroad agent noted that a misunderstanding had arisen over checked luggage. It termed the result a "Near Tragedy."[18]

However, in the midst of inter-group strife, significant forces were pulling in the opposite direction. As a measure of stability came to the region (with a demographic shift away from young single workers to a more family-based environment), ethnic and racial accommodation became more apparent. While the racism deeply rooted in American society prevented blacks from fully participating in this trend, immigrant groups became absorbed into the native white population, if not in the first generation then in the second. Intermarriages became common between people of different ethnic backgrounds, even between Catholics and Protestants. The public schools served as a potent Americanizing force and provided a place where "mountain children and immigrant children . . . freely interacted," says Cantrell. Segregated schools excluded black children from this interaction. Nevertheless, the intense, shared experience of coalfield life above and under ground helped break down racial as well as ethnic barriers. In the early 1930s researcher James Laing asserted that the conditions of everyday life forged "cordial" black-white relations and a "spirit of cooperation and good will" between the races.[19]

The region's dependence on coal created a strong bond among all coalfield inhabitants. Regardless of class, occupation, or ethnicity, the vicissitudes of the coal economy affected all. Jews constituted a distinct ethno-religious group whose non-Christianity, generations-old strategies for maintaining group cohesion, and lack of direct involvement in the coal industry led

them to maintain their separate identity more fully than other immigrant groups. Yet even they "assimilated just about as completely as you could be assimilated" while still remaining Jewish, asserted one second generation coalfield Jew.[20]

The dependence on coal divided people as well as uniting them, as coal companies strove to keep costs low and unions out while workers fought for improved conditions and better pay. These divisions, occurring along class lines, served to promote ethnic and racial unity within each class. Working-class solidarity managed to prevail against cultural differences and ethnic-racial animosities among coal miners. The United Mine Workers helped advance this trend by pursuing a multi-ethnic, multi-racial organizing policy. Class identification and a shared belief in mainstream values such as progress helped to meld the multicultural middle class as well. Soon, sporadic but fierce class conflict overshadowed racial and ethnic hostility.[21]

Like their UMW enemies, coal operators had a vested interest in promoting inter-group harmony. Despite the belief that a certain amount of ethnic divisiveness had a beneficial effect in impeding unionism (a conviction which did not, finally, hold true), the region's power structure advanced a rosy view of diversity that stressed cooperation among the various peoples engaged in the capitalist enterprise. Dependent for their profits on a multicultural workforce, elites praised foreigners, blacks, and mountain natives as long as they were willing to work hard, and celebrated the impact of industrialization in bringing progress, capitalist values, and Americanism to these three benighted groups. In a 1922 speech to his fellow coal operators, the fiercely anti-union J. G. Bradley rhapsodized: "One's faith in the 'melting pot' is reestablished upon seeing the children of Jugo-Slavish, Hungarian, and Italian parents leading the schools in the coal fields in regularity of attendance and in concentrated application to their work." Immigrants received much praise as they were generally considered to be more industrious than

others, "an asset to the State." The result was a sort of self-serving cosmopolitanism that encouraged tolerance of different kinds of people as long as they obeyed the rules and did not challenge the structure of economic relations. A 1912 newspaper article stated,

> A person is not questioned as to where he came from. All that is required is that he contains worth, and that he is willing to abide by the provisions of the law. He may be a day laborer or he may be a capitalist . . . both are necessary in the development of any section and both are welcomed as long as their personal conduct warrant that welcome. [22]

While the elite countenanced no dissent from the existing order, it set a tone that was, at least, not xenophobic and, at best, broad-minded in regard to race and ethnicity compared to other parts of the nation. Perceptions of immigrants changed from alien (in either the comical or frightening sense) to acceptable. This transition reached its zenith with America's entry into World War I, as articles in coalfield newspapers such as "Our Faithful Italian Friends" and "Syrians Prove Loyal" lauded the Americanism of local immigrants during a time of national need. Wartime conditions provided scope for elites to advance their ideology of mutual cooperation between workers and employers and to present their vision of coalfield harmony. One coal industry trade journal waxed eloquent on the multicultural nature of a "Patriotic Demonstration at Gary, W. Va.," carefully listing all the participating immigrant and African American lodges. The event, presided over by the superintendent of U.S. Coal & Coke, included speeches by a Catholic priest, a Methodist minister, and *McDowell Times* editor M. T. Whittico, who "spoke for the colored citizens."[23]

Editor Whittico's participation at the rally was more than fitting, since his newspaper served as principal cheerleader for harmonious relations between the coal companies and the African American population. As a middle class black leader, he shared with elite whites a firm belief in the capitalist order. The *McDowell Times* scrupulously avoided any hint that coal miners might

have legitimate grievances against their employers. Yet Whittico's devotion also sprang from the fact that the coal industry offered unprecedented opportunity to blacks. The circumstances surrounding the development of the southern coalfields enabled them to come "closer to finding economic equality than . . . perhaps anywhere else in America," writes Ronald Lewis. The region's sizable black working class provided the basis for vibrant black communities with their own small middle class of business people, teachers, and professionals. In an environment that came to be marked by relatively good race relations, blacks interacted with whites on a variety of levels, including participating in local politics. Joe Trotter notes that interracial cooperation took place primarily along class lines, within both the elite and the working classes.[24]

The African American demographic presence was strongest in McDowell County, and Keystone—the most open of all coalfield towns—emerged as the center of black life in the region, the "Mecca of the Coalfields," as the *McDowell Times* often proclaimed. The newspaper enthused that Keystone "is and always will be famous for its cosmopolitan spirit, its even handed dealing with both races." It could state with confidence that "a man couldn't be lynched in Keystone." Despite its penchant for hyperbole, there is no reason to doubt its claim that "white and colored live more nearly and evenly friends in this city than in any other in the country." In fact, corroboration comes from an entirely oppositional source: the 1912 anti-Keystone diatribe *Sodom and Gomorrah of Today: Or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia*. The author (the "Virginia Lad") harshly criticized the town's lack of housing segregation and lambasted its white politicians for "catering to the negro." While the pamphlet's nominal purpose was to expose the immoral activities in Cinder Bottom, the true cause of the Lad's ire seems to have been the lack of appropriate racial standards, from licentious race-mixing in that infamous red light district to

cooperation between ordinary blacks and whites on a daily level. He made sure to point out that the five-member Keystone City Council contained two Jews and two blacks, though he did not comment on the Jews except to note that they were "prominent merchants of the town."[25]

With its sizable number of Jews and blacks (in 1900 the population was 40 percent black and 10 percent Jewish), Keystone offers an interesting glimpse into black-Jewish interaction. Articles in the *McDowell Times* through the 1910s suggest that the two groups maintained generally good relations (though it should be kept in mind that advertising revenue from Jewish merchants probably influenced the paper's coverage). An item praising leading Jewish businessman Wolf Bank stressed that there was "no discrimination between the races" at his café. The *Times* hailed "congenial" theater owner Louis Shore as "public spirited" after he invited a local black church to hold services in his theater free of charge until the church could rebuild after a disaster. The newspaper urged readers to patronize Shore's theater because "poor, black or white, they treat you right," and encouraged them to attend Israel Totz's theater because "Mr. Totz has on many occasions proven his friendship" to blacks. Describing Totz as "fair, just, and courteous," the *Times* noted that "one is made to feel welcome" in his theater and, moreover, his pictures "do not tend to incite race hatred" (probably a reference to the recently-released film *Birth of a Nation,* which sparked banning campaigns by African American groups across the state). One of Totz's Grand Theater ads promised "courteous and impartial attention," pointing out that "one man's money goes as far as the other."[26]

But unlike in most other southern locales, Jewish-black relations were not restricted to merchant and customer. The position attained by African Americans enabled the black middle class to interact with others on a broader and more equal footing than elsewhere, leading not only to friendships between blacks and Jews, but also to diverse economic and political relationships.

Lacking a professional cohort of their own, Jews used the services of African American lawyers for legal matters both routine and remarkable. Isadore Katzen's defense team at his murder trial included prominent black attorney Arthur Froe; Froe and fellow black attorney Harry Capehart successfully argued for merchant Sigmund Kohn in a civil dispute before the state Supreme Court. Jews worked with or contended against African American businessmen in real estate deals. The two groups shared a Republican political orientation before the 1930s and both actively supported the 1912 gubernatorial campaign of local luminary Henry D. Hatfield. This alliance led the *Times* to endorse the county's sole Jewish lawyer, Sam Solins of Welch, for the office of pardon attorney in 1913. The *Times* noted that Solins, "together with some of his influential Hebrew friends, worked untiringly" for Hatfield's election, with the result that "more than two-thirds of the Hebrews of the state" voted for Hatfield. "The colored boys of McDowell have no better friend than Attorney Solins of Welch, and they admire him for his hustling qualities, clean record, and straight Republicanism," the endorsement concluded.[27]

Only a few miles from the border with Jim Crow Virginia, Keystone must have stood as an egregious affront to white supremacists. Yet despite significant political and civic cooperation, the town's white critics and black supporters probably overstated the degree of interracial social contact. Social life remained largely segregated (at least, outside of Cinder Bottom). Although whites and blacks maintained individual friendships, clubs and churches were organized strictly along racial lines and society columns show no evidence of black-white interaction. Interviews suggest that the two races did not often mix socially, but got along nevertheless.[28]

That statement holds true for the coalfields in general. Certain types of black-white interaction were acceptable; children could play together after school, men could engage in "informal recreational activities," neighbor women could visit each others' homes. But such

exchanges occurred with a clear understanding of the limits involved. As a *McDowell Times* article extolling Keystone's race relations observed, "Of course there is no social equality here and no one wants nor looks for it. We all get along well without friction." Customary if not legal segregation separated blacks and whites in housing and public facilities, though enough contradictory evidence exists to suggest that patterns of segregation were uneven.[29]

Whites maintained a belief in their racial superiority and would act on that belief if threatened. The 1920s resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan swept the coalfields along with the rest of the nation, though the preoccupations of local KKK chapters, as elsewhere, ranged from racism and nativism to fighting unionism and upholding their vision of morality. The Klan's ascendancy was brief and it was generally frowned upon by local authorities. In Middlesboro, Kentucky, the city council passed an ordinance in 1923 forbidding public speech that "would bring ridicule to any person or race or incite hatred between races and classes," and in 1924 made it illegal to wear a mask in public. Nevertheless, the KKK marched with fanfare through many coalfield towns, attracting large numbers of supporters. Its popularity serves as a reminder that, as Joe Trotter states, "racial subordination . . . sharply differentiated" the worlds of black and white. Yet the oppressiveness of the deep South and the estrangement between races characteristic of the North were both absent. The delicate balance of interracial cooperation and segregation, the existence of "cordial" black-white relations and a "spirit of good will" within a framework of racism and discrimination, mark coalfield race relations as particularly complex.[30]

African Americans were not the only coalfield residents who felt threatened by the KKK. The Klan's overt demonstrations of native white Protestant intolerance in the 1920s reminded Jews, Catholics, and indeed members of all the region's immigrant groups, that despite their

ongoing integration into coalfield society, they had not completely shed their status as "outsiders." But most reminders came in less sinister, more mundane ways. The continued use of derogatory ethnic names such as "dagos," "hunkies," and "polacks" remained a sore point for some immigrants and their descendants, though many dismissed the practice as reflecting simple ignorance rather than hostility or bigotry. Some reacted to their less-than-equal position in the time-honored way of successive waves of American immigrants: by seizing on their "superior" racial status to blacks. One account of coalfield life asserts that immigrant coal miners tended to be more racist than native white miners.[31]

The religions brought into the coalfields by Southern and Eastern Europeans furnished a conspicuous difference between natives and immigrants. The region's longstanding tradition of religious freedom had fostered among mountain residents an "ecumenical openness" that respected the rights of others to practice their own faith. Yet this sensibility vied with nativist influences heightened by some of the more dogmatic tenets of fundamentalist Protestantism. Some people subscribed to the anti-Catholicism that had long been a prominent feature of American nativism. "Catholic was more hated than Jew," observed one lifelong resident of the region. Catholics were suspected of following the pope rather than the Bible—and the pope, to some, was associated with the anti-Christ. Margaret Ripley-Wolfe writes that mountaineers had many "false ideas" about Catholic belief and practice, characterizing their stance toward Catholicism as "suspicion and curiosity mixed with a measure of hostility"—with curiosity, fortunately, outweighing hostility.[32]

Trends toward assimilation and inter-group harmony obviously did not eliminate racial, ethnic, or religious antagonism. Nor did it prevent widespread stereotyping. The inclination to label and define people from different backgrounds, to respond to social and economic tensions

by ascribing blame to a somehow-alien "other," did not disappear after the coalfields settled down and inter-group relations improved in the post-World War I era. The tendency became muted but remained, affecting relations between people in subtle yet important ways. Each group would take a part in serving as "other" for someone else: African Americans, foreigners, Catholics, Jews, even native mountaineers were not immune from being thrust into that role. All faced the contradictions of acceptance and estrangement—but each group dealt with its own set of contradictions. Jews were removed from the ethnic-related turbulence that accompanied the early stage of the coal boom: their numbers were too small to pose a threat to anyone else and they did not compete with other groups for jobs. Having lived in the U.S. longer than immigrants recruited into the mines, they spoke English as well as other coalfield languages and thus were neither as "foreign" nor as prone to conflicts based on miscommunication. But they would not be spared the less violent consequences of being perceived as "other."

Sometimes the result was ironic. After David Scott's newly-built store at Wilcoe, West Virginia, burned down in 1905 (along with his home), he lacked the financial resources to start over again. Heavily in debt, he decided his only option was to get a job in the mines. But when he approached Edward O'Toole, the superintendent of U.S. Coal & Coke, the colonel replied, "Dave, the coal mines are no place for a Jew. You get re-established." O'Toole let the young man occupy a company house and gave him some supplies to tide him over while another locally prominent figure, Bill Hatfield, lent him the capital he needed to rebuild. Because O'Toole subscribed to the stereotype that Jews were unfit for rugged manual labor, he refused to hire Scott as a coal miner. The same prejudice would keep Jews from employment in the major manufacturing industries of the Northeast, but for Scott the effect of this discrimination was entirely beneficial.[33]

Meanwhile, other ethnic groups were being typecast as *only* fit for manual labor, such as Slavs and blacks. Coal operators had even convinced themselves that different ethnic groups were suited by nature for different jobs in the mines (the fact that opinions differed regarding which jobs matched which groups apparently did not cause them to question their assumptions). In one case, this too ended up benefiting a local Jewish man. According to Randall Lawrence,

> In one county seat in West Virginia, a coal company hired a Jewish businessman to meet the trains carrying the immigrants. The Jew, a linguist by reason of his varied life in Europe and America, would meet trains and identify immigrants by nationality and language for the coal companies. Poles, Magyars, Slovaks, Slovenians, Italians . . . arrived by the thousands in the heart of the Appalachian wilderness. Some companies preferred Hungarians as miners, while others might be seeking Italian stone masons. The Jewish businessman was on the spot at the train station to match employer with potential employee.[34]

These two stories show that Jews had advantages over other groups. Both David Scott and the unnamed Jewish businessman were Eastern Europeans, just like the workers whom the latter helped to classify. Yet unlike the workers, they were not "foreigners." Or to be more accurate, they were not *as* foreign, at least not to the coal operators, with whom they shared a business orientation and a language—not only the language of English, but the language of capitalism. For this reason, entrepreneurial Jews received favorable coverage in coalfield newspapers much earlier than members of other immigrant groups. Long before Italians were transformed from violent primitives to loyal friends, Jews were extolled as up-and-coming business leaders and self-made men. Yet the Jewish businessman described by Lawrence spoke the language of the alien "others" as well. Both his foreignness and his middleman status—in this case, as intermediary between coal operators and workers—come through in the story. Jewish-gentile relations would be informed by the paradoxes and ambiguities inherent in the Jews' middleman

role and their religious/cultural distinctiveness. The following sections explore the social position of coalfield Jews, and their relations with others, in light of these dynamics.

Insiders and Outsiders

The "Pocahontas Pickings" section of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* contained two lead items on January 5, 1916. In the first, Pocahontas resident Henry Hicks was badly injured by three "ruffians (Russians)" who attacked him "in a savage manner." Just below this, Mr. and Mrs. Sol Baach hosted local Masonic officers at a stylish dinner party, at which their guests presented them with an "elegant silver water pitcher," accompanied by much speech-making. The juxtaposition of the "savage," unnamed Russians and the "elegant" Baaches offers a striking contrast between the foreign "other" and the civilized local society that coalfield newspapers were determined to promote. The Baaches, second-generation German Jews, serve as another example that Jews in the coalfields belonged in a different social category than the foreigners: they were insiders, not outsiders.[35]

This status was not limited to the second generation. The stance of local newspapers toward some Jewish immigrants—leading or up-and-coming business people—ranged from admiration to a sort of jocular banter that confirmed their insider standing. They were heartily congratulated and often teased when they got married or had children. In 1913 the *McDowell Recorder* announced the birth of "our friend Joe Herzbrun's first grandchild, and he is the happiest man in the state." When Sam Weinstein's son was born in 1905, the *Middlesboro News* remarked, "Sam takes the event fairly well, though one of the boys says he sold a four dollar pair of pants for a dollar and a half and gave the man eight dollars and a half in change for a five dollar bill. However, this latter may be a 'campaign lie.'" (He was running for city council at the time.)

Their travel for business, pleasure, or health was noted and their opinions quoted; when Sam's brother Herman returned from a 1901 visit to the baths at Hot Springs, Arkansas, the newspaper reported, "he thinks well of the place as a bodily sanitarium but considers it a moral hell on Earth." Their deaths merited sober front page coverage. The many memorials to Joe Lopinsky included a poem in the *McDowell Recorder* that concluded, "They tell us Heaven's wondrous / And free from earthly guile— / It is brighter now than ever / With Uncle Joe's sweet smile."[36]

Once in awhile, though, quite a different attitude emerged from the printed page. Jews were not exempt from the derisive or stereotypical treatment other coalfield ethnic groups received. When it occurred, such treatment followed well-established patterns in how gentiles have traditionally viewed Jews. Coalfield attitudes about foreigners generally, and Jews in particular, conformed to trends in American nativism.

Although Jewish immigrants faced the same sort of opposition that greeted other foreign groups in the U.S., anti-semitism had an extra dimension because it drew on centuries of animosity toward the quintessential European "other." American society used several categories of difference to define and stigmatize Jews in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries, all borrowed from Europe. In the economic realm, Jews were seen as wealthy, concerned only with making money, dishonest and exploitative in their dealings with non-Jews, stingy, greedy. They also could be ascribed worthy qualities, such as thrifty, hard working, ambitious; as in Europe, Jews came to embody capitalist traits and values, both good and bad. In religious discourse, Jews were portrayed as natural enemies of Christians, accused of collective responsibility for the death of Jesus and blamed for not accepting Christianity. Conversely, they were acknowledged to be the "Chosen People," possessed of a venerable, if mysterious, tradition. Finally, pseudo-scientific racial theories placed Jews lower on the racial scale than northern Europeans. Many "experts"

contended that Jews were not "white," as shown by certain physical and behavioral characteristics. In Europe, adherents of scientific racism saw Jews as uniquely defective, the prototypical "mongrel race," while American racial theorists stressed the inferiority of all Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups, with Jews often depicted as the worst of a bad bunch. Whether economic, religious, or racial, stereotypes malignant or benign reinforced the idea that Jews were somehow different, a people apart.[37]

Manifestations of all these ways of viewing Jews could be found in the coalfields. While the region's newspapers stressed aspects of Jewish economic behavior that, from a capitalist perspective, they regarded as highly positive, even articles that commended Jewish merchants occasionally had a subtext that played on ancient aversive images, intentionally or not. The *McDowell Recorder* frequently reported on the activities of Sam Polon, informing readers when he made an interesting real estate deal, when he took in a World Series game in New York, when he enrolled in school to improve his English. One 1913 article noted,

> Sam Polin [sic], our real estate broker, is back from a trip to Logan where he is also dealing in lands and lots. Our red headed Jew is a hustler. Prithee, what a change has come through the beneficent laws of America. Less than a century ago a Jew wanted no real estate. He couldn't get it in his grip and to have it otherwise meant to be robbed certain, under some form of guise and law.

The image of a Jew getting property "in his grip" is hardly favorable; it resonates with the Shylock archetype of the grasping, tightfisted Jew. Yet the editor sincerely meant to compliment his friend and to contrast America's enlightened attitude toward Jews with that of Russia.[38]

Occasionally both the white-owned *Recorder* and the black-owned *McDowell Times* ridiculed Jews by reprinting hackneyed ethnic jokes that featured thick Yiddish accents and crafty economic behavior. At times they aimed their derision at local Jewish immigrants. In

discussing the impact of impending prohibition on the town's numerous (multi-racial and multi-ethnic) business owners, the *Times* singled out two Jews, snickering that "Hyman's and Hermanson's faces will look haggard and worn as if they had lost the last relative on earth." The *Recorder* offered this 1913 page four blurb, headlined "A True One":

> This happened Christmas, in McDowell County: He is a little fat Jew, but his wife is a large, handsome, queenly woman. She was visiting his store, and after leaving some of his friends, who were standing by, asked: Uncle Jake, who was that fine looking lady?" Replied he, "dot vas no lady, dot iss mine wife!"

In contrast, a front page article that same day praised "Uncle Joe Lopinsky," who had "caught the New Year spirit in downright earnest" by offering "one of the most unique shows" in the history of the Welch theater. The use of the term "uncle" to describe each man suggests, perhaps, a patronizing attitude toward both. But Lopinsky, in this and numerous other articles, is treated with affection and respect while "Uncle Jake" is mocked as a "little fat Jew." [39]

What was behind the different treatment of the two merchants? Their personal characteristics may have affected gentile attitudes toward them. One clue is the heavy Yiddish accent attributed to "Uncle Jake." It is quite likely that this man was not as Americanized as Lopinsky or some of the other Jewish merchants, that his behavior appeared more foreign than theirs. In other words, in order to become accepted into middle class coalfield society, it was necessary to blend in, to lose the most obvious trappings of one's ethnicity. Of course, this does not make the coalfields exceptional in any way; throughout American history, Jews and other minorities have responded to the ethnocentric attitudes of the surrounding society by attempting to Americanize, to shed their seemingly alien ways, in order to achieve social mobility.[40]

Although there is no way to know for sure, it is likely that the joke refers to Jake Shore, a man who spoke Yiddish (in addition to English) his whole life. Like some of the other Jewish

immigrants who felt perfectly at home in the rough-and tumble early years of the coal boom, Shore made little attempt to blend into the emerging middle class. His litigious nature involved him in numerous court battles with everyone from struggling Jewish businesswoman Bessie Zaltzman to non-Jewish customers to the mighty U.S. Coal & Coke—and he was known by both Jews and non-Jews for being "tight" with his money.[41] Not only did Shore appear to be more foreign, therefore, he seemed to conform to derogatory stereotypes of Jews. Since Joe Lopinsky did not match these negative images, he was looked upon by gentiles as not *as* Jewish; his *McDowell Times* obituary paid him this backhanded compliment: "in the presence of his sunny generous disposition one forgot that he was a Jew." Such comments suggest that Lopinsky and other Jewish merchants were embraced to the degree that they did not seem to act "Jewish"—meaning, did not fit gentiles' preconceived notion of how Jews typically act. In the minds of non-Jews, this conception combined into one image the Yiddish accent, foreign mannerisms and customs, *and* negative characteristics such as stinginess and avarice.[42]

For Jewish immigrants, therefore, the role of merchant did not automatically confer middle class respectability; one also had to be sufficiently Americanized. But it certainly helped. Another set of contrasting articles reveals how attitudes about Jews were shaped by their position on the economic ladder. A 1901 *Fayette Journal* blurb on the marriage of "Mr. I. Bloom, a leading merchant of Mt. Hope," remarked, "the happy young couple are now enjoying the delights of an extended honeymoon trip. . . . The best wishes and happiest congratulations of their many Fayette county friends are assured them." Clearly, Bloom was an esteemed member of the community, his Jewish background notwithstanding. Several months earlier, the newspaper had reported on the trial of two local officials who had extorted money from a peddler. The reporter found the incident quite amusing and managed to make fun of all

concerned, starting out by noting that the trial "brought to light a way of collecting fines which to say the least, is peculiar and novel and evidently very effective." The article explained,

> Sometime ago, Abraham Joseph, a Jew peddler, appeared at Hill Top with his wares. Mayor Harris gave a "friend" some money and instructed him to make a purchase from Joseph. This was done and the mayor caused Sergeant House to arrest the unsuspecting Israelite [for peddling without a license]. His person secured, court was convened in a convenient saloon and the verdict was "guilty," and the prisoner was fined $5 and the costs. Joseph refused to pay it, thereupon the mayor raised him a dollar. This did not have a producting [sic] effect so the dispensers of justice had him bound hand and foot and placed him on a barrel, under the broiling sun. Abraham endured his torture until he became sick before the shekles [sic] necessary to liquidate were forthcoming.

A vast social distance between "Mr. Bloom" and the "Jew peddler" is apparent. The "Israelite," possessed not of dollars but of shekels, referred to by his first name as if to simultaneously highlight and make light of his Old Testament connection, is a strange and alien presence. Unlike I. Bloom, the familiar and solid man of business, Abraham Joseph is the quintessential wandering Jew who simply "appeared" with his "wares." And his utter lack of status tempted local officials to take advantage of him.[43]

Yet the story offers a number of complications that underscore the complex nature of ethnic and class relations in the region. For one thing, the peddler may have been at a disadvantage because of his foreignness and his lowly occupation—but it was Mayor Harris and Sergeant House who were on trial, and a local jury "promptly found them guilty" of robbery, according to the article. A judge set aside the verdict and ordered a new trial, at which another jury found the two men guilty of the lesser crime of assault and battery; they each received a fifty dollar fine. That not one but two local juries (as well as the grand jury that issued the indictments) sided with

the peddler against local authorities, however corrupt (Harris already had established a rather dubious reputation), surely indicates something about the ability of coalfield citizens to set aside whatever prejudices they may have had. It would appear that the rule of law in the region enabled *some* justice to be achieved, even for a humble foreigner.[44]

Furthermore, the disparity in social status between Bloom and Joseph obscures the reality that some of the most respected Jewish businessmen in the region started out as lowly peddlers. Although in some cases the local elite welcomed Jewish entrepreneurs immediately upon their arrival, these articles (as well as the examples of Lopinsky and "Uncle Jake") offer evidence that Jewish newcomers had to travel across economic and social boundaries to become accepted: from peddler to merchant, from foreign to American, from unrespectable to respectable—and this they accomplished to different degrees. Some never bothered to make the journey at all, remaining content to keep their social lives within the confines of the Jewish community, though most opted for integration into the coalfield middle class.

Abraham Joseph evidently achieved a certain amount of social mobility, himself: he became a small shopkeeper. Here, however, a greater irony of the story becomes apparent. The Abraham Joseph who owned a store in Fayette County a few years later was not a Jew, but an Assyrian. So it seems likely that the "Jew peddler" was not Jewish at all, but rather, belonged to the one other coalfield ethnic group that followed the same peddler-to-merchant path.[45] Yet the association of "peddler" and "Jew" was entrenched in popular lore, and it is not surprising that the *Fayette Journal* made the link. In fact, it was not unusual for coalfield residents to mistake Syrian or Lebanese merchants for Jews. Though Arab immigrants also occupied a commercial niche in the region—and their contingent was not a small one—in the public mind, the role of peddler or merchant correlated with "Jew." Whether Assyrian or Jewish, the peddler in the story was most

definitely foreign, and the fact that his Jewish identity was central to the narrative demonstrates the tendency to look on Jews as "other," despite the insider status of some.[46]

Throughout their tenure in the coalfields, Jews encountered occasional belittling or disparaging references to stereotypes based on their middleman role. During the Depression, a restaurant in Harlan offered a fifteen-cent meal that included as a drink "Jew Pop"—water. A Jewish woman who grew up in Pineville, Kentucky, recalled that residents referred to the local grocer as "Harry the Jew." Perhaps his practice of reading a Yiddish newspaper every day in his store caused him to be singled out in this fashion. Many second generation coalfield Jews mentioned that the expression "jew him down" was commonplace, although one interviewee noted that people who used the phrase did not necessarily realize its connection to Jews. That all Jews were wealthy, that they were "tight" with their money, that they engaged in "sharp" practices, that they would not do manual labor, such as work in the coal mines, were common beliefs among non-Jews irrespective of race or class. Certainly coal operators were not immune from the impulse. W. P. Tams once referred to a "little shyster Jew lawyer," while Justus Collins complained about the "german-jew controlled" town of Cincinnati.[47]

But again, Jewish stereotypes had their seemingly "positive" side as well. One gentile woman explained that Jews were generally perceived as being wealthy, but only some people viewed that as negative (and those people were "just jealous"). She remembered being told that Jews helped each other financially by setting up their co-religionists in business three times, allowing each person two failures. If loan recipients did not succeed by then, their backers "wouldn't fool with them" anymore. "I think it's wonderful if they stick together like that," she offered. Another woman recalled that Jews in her town had been somewhat "clannish," but hastened to add that other ethnic groups also exhibited this quality.[48]

It is unlikely that coalfield residents had much direct contact with the racial theories current in American and European intellectual circles, yet the notion of an essential Jewish difference was widespread, even taken for granted, in the pre-World War I years. This reflected the foreignness as well as the Jewishness of the new arrivals. Popular discourse during the era, nationally as well as in the coalfields, used a simplified version of pseudo-scientific racial theory to distinguish "foreigners" from both "white" (associated with "Anglo-Saxon") and "black." Each of the region's immigrant groups, including Jews (or "Hebrews"), was liable to be depicted as occupying its own separate category somewhere below whites and above blacks on the racial scale. This is seen in the tendency of coalfield newspapers to refer only to native-born whites as "white," while immigrants were referred to, in contrast, as "foreigners" or by their specific "racial" background (such as Italian, Hebrew, "turk," etc.).[49]

The more foreign a person or group appeared to be, and the lower their economic status, the less "white" they were. As the contrast between "Israelite" peddler and respectable merchant suggests, economic mobility and assimilation into coalfield society enabled foreigners to "become" white. In the coalfields, where Jewish entrepreneurship was valued and assimilation was swift compared to large cities with dense Jewish neighborhoods, the racial status of Jews quickly moved into the white category. Other immigrants also became "whiter" as they assimilated, and by the second generation, members of all the non-native groups enjoyed the same advantages of white privilege as their "white" neighbors whose families had lived in the U.S. for generations. Blacks remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy, forced to serve as the primary "other" against which members of the majority defined themselves.

A 1915 scandal and its coverage by two local newspapers sheds light on the coalfield racial

and class hierarchy during a time of transition. When the story of a young black girl forced into prostitution in Keystone and Kimball first broke (see chapter 4), the African American-owned *McDowell Times* reacted to rumors by wondering pointedly "whether anybody other than Jews and Negroes" had been indicted. One of the two African American madams brought to trial was well connected with "leading white and Hebrew businessmen" and there could be little doubt that non-black patrons were involved. The *Times* later reported that "eight or nine men, white, Jews, Italians, and Negroes, some of them leading business men and others officers of the law," had been indicted for rape. In contrast, an article in the white-owned *McDowell Recorder* implied that the scandal involved only African Americans. After reporting on the testimony of black witnesses, the *Recorder* falsely stated, "this was about the extent of the state's testimony." (The *Times*, perhaps limited in how far it could go in reporting on matters involving whites, abstained from offering details of the court proceedings, stating, "because of the character of the testimony, it will not be published.") In fact, at least two non-black brothel patrons, a Jewish former bartender and a gentile coal company bookkeeper, were forced to testify. A perusal of court records turned up only one indictment of a non-black man: the Jewish bartender—hardly one of the "leading business men" cited by the *Times*, but conspicuously absent from the *Recorder*'s account. Apparently this man was not quite "white" enough to escape censure, yet he was sufficiently pale to avoid serious penalty; no record could be found that he ever stood trial. (In his testimony, he refused to answer questions under grounds of self-incrimination.) The only people convicted were African American, two madams and one customer.[50]

Jews who settled in the South undoubtedly benefited from the region's racial caste system. Although certain factors cast doubt on the racial standing of recently-arrived immigrants—their foreign ways, the lowly occupations of those who had yet to achieve economic mobility, their

close economic relationship with blacks—"Jews were, first of all, white, or . . . could pass for white," asserts Eli Evans. In a region where "whiteness" was all-important, this fact actually gave southern Jews an advantage over their northern co-religionists in integrating into the social scene, though Evans goes on to say that their non-Christianity and a lingering distrust of "the foreigner" would ensure that Jews in the South would "always be outsiders." This complex dynamic, though it caused Jews some confusion and uneasiness (not to mention a certain amount of discomfort and guilt about the people below them on the racial scale), came as a relief to people accustomed to serving as their society's "other" in the old country.[51]

While not as rigid or oppressive as in the deep South, the racial caste system in the coalfields offered similar benefits to whites or those who could "become" white. Coupled with the region's greater receptiveness to outsiders, it resulted in a climate that ultimately proved favorable to immigrants. Indeed, when racial nativism and anti-semitism re-emerged on a national scale after a brief hiatus during World War I, the gains made by immigrants in the coalfields were not rolled back. Jews and members of other "foreign" groups had become sufficiently incorporated into coalfield society.[52]

Although the racial status of Jews was often tied to evolving perceptions of foreigners within the context of a white-black continuum, the belief that Jews constituted a unique race distinct from all gentiles also existed in the coalfields. The source of this belief was much older than modern racial theories that found their way into popular discourse. Rather than appearing on the pages of coalfield newspapers, it was expressed by the less educated and more rural coalfield residents. When the first Jewish child was born in Mingo County around 1903, according to his son, "people came from all over to see the 'Jew-baby'—expecting horns." A Jewish woman

reported that when her family first arrived in the Harlan County hamlet of Poor Fork around 1912, local women gathered to inspect her mother, turning her around so that they could see her from all sides. Other mountain natives displayed a similar reaction. A Jewish woman who grew up in Lewisburg, West Virginia (just outside the coalfields), recalled that when her father opened a store around 1920, "one of the farmers stuck his head in the door and said, 'I've never seen a Jew, I'm just looking.' He wasn't hostile, just curious. And honest enough to say it. . . . My father was a very social being, he said 'come on in!' and they chatted." Even decades later the tendency to see Jews as exotic specimens had not disappeared. A Williamson woman interviewed in the early 1970s recalled, "When I was in the hospital with my daughter, a nurse came by and said, 'That's the whitest Jew baby I've ever seen!'"[53]

Such experiences were common throughout the rural South and indicated neither hostility nor disparagement, but rather curiosity about and fascination with Jews. Eli Evans's grandmother wrote that when she gave birth to a daughter not long after settling in a small eastern North Carolina town around 1910, "all of our country friends came to town just to see what a 'Jew-baby' looked like." Ancient superstitions about Jews lingered in the countryside. But more important, country folk steeped in the Old Testament relished the opportunity of coming face-to-face with the descendants of the biblical patriarchs and prophets. To them, Jews indeed belonged to a special race: one whose ancient past they had minutely studied but whose present they knew virtually nothing about.[54]

The Chosen People?

From early twentieth century observers of mountain life such as Emma Bell Miles and John C. Campbell to modern scholars such as Loyal Jones, Deborah McCauley, and Catherine

Albanese, a picture has emerged of Appalachians as an "intensely religious people" whose "remarkable knowledge of the Scriptures" has attested to the "primacy of the Bible" in their lives. The region has always contained a great deal of religious diversity; McCauley, for example, distinguishes between the mainstream Protestant denominations found in county seat towns and the numerous forms of true "mountain religion" rooted in the countryside. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that a heartfelt Christianity pervaded the coalfields during the first half of the twentieth century.[55]

When Jews appeared on the scene, the emphasis that local Christian custom placed on scriptural study in everyday religious practice stimulated an interest in these modern-day representatives of the Old Testament's "chosen people." Jews who were knowledgeable about their religion—or knew even a smattering of Hebrew, as most did—were respected and sought after for theological discussions or spoken demonstrations of the ancient tongue. A Jewish woman from Welch recalled her father "discussing the bible every other day with a colorful preacher, McClure." This man was a highly visible disciple of Christianity; as a child in the 1920s she saw him "baptize many people in the river in the main part of town." A rabbi who toured southern West Virginia's coalfield congregations in 1926 was struck by the attitude of local Christians he encountered. Of his train ride from Williamson to Keystone he wrote:

> Our fellow passengers entertained us in a vivid manner. An aged Christian spoke tenderly, wondrously, of pertinent issues. He had read Josephus's *Antiquities* through more than once. He believed in the prophecies embodied in the Book of Daniel. He was opposed to prohibition, and did not approve of higher education for women.

Jews and non-Jews crowded into Keystone's Knights of Pythias hall to hear the rabbi speak.[56]

This positive stance toward Jews and Judaism pertained throughout the South. Journalist Harry Golden asserted in the 1950s that the region exhibited "a pattern of American philo-

semitism" that "springs from the southern Protestant's own attachment to biblical Judaism." The welcome reception given to Jewish peddlers in the southern countryside was based partly on their religiosity, notes historian Louis Schmier. Peddlers who practiced Judaism and conversed on the topic with customers did a better business than those who did not; rural folk were suspicious of Jews who did not display the appropriate trappings of Jewish belief. And they were eager to accommodate kosher dietary restrictions. As one customer explained, "'We'd have their jewfood ready for them and we'd eat hog-meat.'" Eli Evans's grandfather (also named Eli) had a good relationship with his country customers: "Many of the farmers would beg Eli to speak Yiddish for them, just to hear the sounds, and some would bring their families in for a blessing in Hebrew, the tongue of the Israelites. Eli would receive them all piously, as the direct descendant of Isaiah and Moses, the same blood as Jesus." He would sing out Hebrew blessings for them "in his best tenor," to the embarrassment of his wife.[57]

In the coalfields, country people were not the only members of the population intrigued by the religious traditions and practices of local Jews. The extensive coverage newspapers gave to Jewish communal events suggests that town readers shared their interest. At the dedication of the Pocahontas, Virginia, synagogue in 1913, the guest speaker, a Richmond rabbi, "Thrill[ed] a Large Audience with his Eloquence," enthused a *McDowell Recorder* headline. The article noted that the crowd included "a sprinkling of Gentiles," and went on to relay the rabbi's talk on the history of the Jews and the purpose of a synagogue. Newspapers routinely informed readers when coalfield congregations celebrated Jewish holidays, often providing historical background and details about how Jews marked these events. In Middlesboro, a typical article from 1914 disclosed that the high holidays would be "properly observed by the local Hebrew people in their customary manner," including fasting, holding services, and closing their stores. When the

Jewish women of Williamson conducted Sabbath services one evening in 1926, the *Mingo Republican* printed a lengthy front-page article that included the entire invocation, delivered by "Mrs. Harry Schwachter."[58]

The *McDowell Recorder* offered the most elaborate coverage. Its detailed articles about Jewish weddings gave an exotic cast to Jewish custom. One item, noting that "the impressiveness and solemnity of the Hebrew ring ceremony was quite pretty," intoned that the rituals "bespoke times long gone by." Jewish holidays received much attention, though the newspaper did not always get the fine points quite right. An October 1913 front-page story reported,

> This has been a week of festivities with our many Jewish friends in this section. It is New Years week according to their calendar and is known as Rosie Sonie. . . . Many and costly have been their arrangements for this celebration which has been greatly enjoyed by them this week. While this is true there has not been a drunk nor a brawl reported among them. Much have we to learn yet from these people—the chosen race of God himself.

An April 1915 front-page article educated readers about the festival of Passover:

> Monday evening a great many of the Hebrew race in these fields celebrated the anniversary of the "Passover." The custom is to meet in family circles or in friendly groups and indulge in social games, etc., and drink four goblets of wine. The Jews today celebrate it in remembrance of their freedom as a race, much the same as we Americans celebrate the Fourth of July. It might in a sense be called the Hebrew Fourth of July. But it is much older than our American institutions as readers of the Bible will recall. It recalls the story of Moses and his marvelous career as a leader of men.[59]

As these items show, the reporting of Jewish holidays reflected more than a fascination with the religion itself. The small-town progressivism of the county seat towns also comes through, with articles on Jewish themes serving to promote business-oriented values. The sobriety of the

Jewish high holidays was particularly meaningful to coalfield employers, who bemoaned the high rate of absenteeism after the rowdy holiday celebrations of other groups. The *Recorder* often connected Jewish religion and culture to its own preoccupations as booster of the region's economic, cultural, and social development. It interpreted the business achievements of individual merchants as reflecting on the Jews as a people and as an ancient civilization whose doctrines had instilled the proper qualities to get ahead in modern American society. Its articles presented Jews as a civilizing influence, with their respect for learning held up as something for others to emulate. In a story on Sam Polon's rise to prominence as "one of the substantial business men of Welch," it was Polon's determination to study English and "acquire a general education," even after achieving business success, that prompted the comment that "American boys" should "take a lesson from this." An article describing a young Jewish immigrant girl dwelt upon her "fluent English," her excellent "Spencerian" penmanship, and her desire to learn shorthand, all after only two years in the U.S. The writer again concluded, "could not some of our American beauties take a good lesson from this pretty little Russian Jewess?"[60]

The *Recorder* also used items about Jews to flaunt a sort of small town cosmopolitanism that implicitly posited and celebrated a growing sophistication in coalfield life. An article with the provocative title "Was Columbus A Jew?" began, "The other night the writer dropped into a local business house to chat and delve a little into Hebrew philosophy with the Jewish manager. It is a sort of mental relaxation we enjoy." While such items served to proudly affirm local religious broad-mindedness, the newspaper's surprisingly extensive reporting on national and international Jewish issues had a related theme: extolling America as a land of enlightenment and opportunity, in contrast to Europe and especially Russia, where "medieval" attitudes prevailed. Stories of local Jewish "self-made men" typically included a summary of the oppression they had

faced in the old country, and the newspaper also featured general coverage on the plight of Jews in the Russian Empire. Special attention was paid to the infamous 1913 Mendel Beilis trial, with an article expressing outrage that "Today, a Russian Jew is being tried for his life on such a fool charge as ritual murder, a trumped up charge, believed by many, that he murdered Christian children to drink their blood." When Beilis was acquitted the *Recorder* indicated its relief and surprise, since "Very few of us have a very exalted opinion of Russian justice when they are dealing with the Jew." A 1916 article praised coalfield and national campaigns to relieve the distress of Jews in war-torn Europe: "In cases like this there is no Jew nor no Gentile in the big responsive heart of the great American people."[61]

But the *Recorder* did not shirk from reporting America's own variant of the Beilis trial, the Leo Frank case (1913 to 1915), with sympathy toward Frank and denunciations of home-grown anti-semitism. Other coalfield newspapers also covered the story of Frank's trial and lynching.[62] On the whole, the newspapers exhibited an awareness of the major issues of American and world Jewry and a willingness to report on them. Their significant number of Jewish advertisers might have provided one motivation, but an intrinsic interest in certain Jewish-related topics was a factor. Several newspapers expressed enthusiasm for Jewish settlement in the Holy Land; in 1920, for example, the *Williamson Daily News* reprinted a *New York Globe* article noting the "astonishing success" of Jewish reclamation of land in Palestine, which deserved the "sympathy and aid" of the U.S. In the special case of the *Recorder*, the notable amount of space devoted to Jewish issues also reflected the existence of a relatively large Jewish readership. Even fairly obscure topics received attention from the Welch-based newspaper, such as when it reported in 1915 that "Many Jews Enlist with English Army."[63]

The *McDowell Times*, with an African American readership, had its own reasons to cover

Jewish topics. It too had a large number of Jewish advertisers and possibly a Jewish readership as well. Like other coalfield newspapers, it reported on local holiday celebrations and on national and world Jewry (one 1914 article on the war's impact on European Jews quoted from the Reform Jewish publication *American Israelite*). But most of its coverage related to African American concerns or made comparisons between the plight of Jews and blacks. Articles such as "Hebrew Protective League Calls on Colored and Italian Citizens To Combine Against Race Prejudice" highlighted the commonality of prejudice confronted by blacks and Jews in the U.S. When Jews achieved political milestones (the nomination of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court; the election of the nation's first Jewish governor), the coverage implied that such progress could bode well for blacks. The patriotic *Times* also used Jews as a model of how a minority could relate to the majority. One article noted, "The ability of the Jew to remain a distinct people and yet to support loyally the country of their birth or adoption is one of the marvels of history." Other links between blacks and Jews occasionally popped up; in 1917 the paper reported that a local African American teachers' reading circle had discussed Mary Antin's memoir *The Promised Land*. The saga of the Ethiopian Jews (known at that time as the "Black Jews of Abyssinia") especially fascinated the *Times*. But distinctions were also drawn, as when an editorial angrily observed that the lynching of a single Jew, Leo Frank, aroused far more national attention and revulsion than the lynchings of thousands of southern blacks.[64]

The favorable attention paid to Jewish affairs by local newspapers must be seen not only as the result of a strain of philo-semitism in the region, but also as part of a concerted effort by coalfield Jewish communities to garner such coverage. Many articles about communal activities were sent in by the congregations themselves. In 1927, the board of Logan's B'nai El

congregation passed a resolution thanking the *Logan Banner* for "their willingness to print any article we had during the year." In Harlan, a particularly energetic Jewish communal leader submitted a series of articles printed by local newspapers in the early 1930s.[65]

Small-town newspapers routinely covered activities taking place in their communities by printing notices sent in by various groups, but Jews had particular reasons for trying to secure positive recognition. The same newspapers that expounded on Jewish holidays or cheered Jewish efforts to resettle Palestine also printed the occasional derogatory joke or stereotypical reference; it is not surprising that they would want to tip the balance in their favor. Also, as previously discussed, in a region where organized religion played a central role in conferring legitimacy and respectability, Jews had a compelling need to establish themselves as an upstanding religious collective. The articles that Harry Linden sent in to Harlan newspapers demonstrate this function. In 1931 the *Harlan County Courier* gave front-page prominence to his treatises on the high holidays. One article informed readers that "It is on Rosh Hashanah that the Jew searches his inmost being, acknowledges his sins within the sanctuary of his heart, and rededicates himself anew to the loftiest concepts of his religion and his humanity." The following week's story concluded that "visitors of every denomination are most cordially welcomed" to Yom Kippur services. In 1932 the *Harlan Enterprise* even printed a small notice, submitted by Linden, headlined "Harlan Hebrew Congregation Prays for Safety of Lindbergh Baby."[66]

It is unclear how much attention these stories could have drawn, coming at a time of all-consuming labor-management conflict in the Harlan coalfield. But the timing is suggestive. Perhaps, in addition to a philo-semitic bent, a Jewish readership, and a chance to express capitalist values, one final explanation can be discerned for the willingness of coalfield newspapers to devote space to Jewish-related stories. Given the intense class polarization in the

region, the articles may have furthered the cause of reinforcing solidarity among the diverse members of the town-based middle class. Whatever their motivation, coalfield newspapers seemed happy to oblige Jewish congregations by covering their holidays and events.

The journalistic exploits of coalfield Jews were of course intended to present their communities in the most favorable light possible. But their efforts also represented an attempt to educate their neighbors about the basic tenets and practices of the Jewish faith. They were motivated not only by a desire to fit in, but also by an urge to counteract prevailing views of Jews and Judaism. On a regular basis they confronted a fair amount of ignorance among the local populace. One coalfield rabbi of the post-World War II era noted, for example, that non-Jews often asked him, "do Jews believe in Jesus?" Sometimes the stance of local Christians toward Judaism went beyond simple ignorance in ways that Jews found offensive or even somewhat threatening. The commonplace Christian belief perhaps most unsettling, because of its frequent expression, was that Jews bore responsibility for the death of Jesus.[67]

As elsewhere in the South, the negative image of Jew as Christ killer existed side-by-side with the positive view of Jews as the chosen people. The taunt of "Christ killer" was hurled at Jewish children in coalfield schools. The *McDowell Recorder* ran a syndicated religious column that reminded its readers that "the brethren of Jesus were the Jews, who crucified Him. . . . It was on account of envy that the Jews called for His crucifixion. His works were good, and theirs were evil." One Jewish man recalled that his next-door neighbor taught a Sunday school class broadcast on a local radio station. At Easter, he could hear his neighbor rant over the airwaves that "all Jews had killed Christ." Otherwise, though, the man was "as nice a neighbor as you could want." Aside from childhood taunts, coalfield Jews did not believe that the Christ-killer

stigma was directed against them personally, or against local Jewish communities (and, as one man pointed out, children from other groups were also subjected to schoolyard insults). Nevertheless, encounters with this damning charge against "the Jews" could be disquieting.[68]

The pervasive climate of Christianity fostered an insensitivity toward non-Christians that caused more discomfort than direct anti-Jewish expressions. When a child learned in school that "those who love Jesus have a gold heart, those who don't have a black heart," it did not matter that the comment was not aimed at her as a Jew. The public schools provided an ongoing source of Christian activity; some schools had daily prayers and all emphasized celebrations of Christian holidays. Although Jewish children enjoyed sharing holiday experiences with Christian friends, the heavy emphasis on these observances sometimes got to be a bit too much. As one man noted of his Beckley childhood in the 1940s, "the town became strictly Christian at Christmas. . . . I found out at Christmastime I was Jewish." Eventually he came to resent having to participate in his school's annual Christmas play.[69]

Nor were adults immune to feelings of estrangement caused by the weaving of Christianity into the fabric of daily life. Public events invariably began or ended with Christian prayers. A Jewish native of Logan observed, "I've found few Christians and Christian ministers who are sensitive to the fact that there are non-Christians around." A participant in Jerome David's Williamson study recounted being the only Jewish family at a baccalaureate service where the minister made derogatory remarks about the ancient Jews. To compound this person's dismay, "As we walked out, people were saying, 'wasn't that a wonderful service.'" Though Jews participated actively civic and social clubs, David found that "the clubs have Christian overtones which tend to make many Jews feel like outsiders." One woman was especially bothered, telling him, "I used to belong to Rotary Anns; the meeting ended with a prayer in Jesus' name. The club

had no purpose or aim. The thought of going made me sick. I had nothing in common with the people—just too Churchy—that's all they would talk about." Another person flatly stated, "If you're not a Protestant in Williamson, you're a foreigner."[70]

Yet the reaction of Jews to the ubiquitous presence of Christianity varied considerably. While some felt alienated, others took it in stride as part of small town life in a locale where religion occupied a central place in peoples' lives. Two mitigating factors helped to alleviate their discomfort. First, their own Jewish communities provided an important refuge. Second, they focused on the positive aspects of their relations with non-Jews, on the substantial evidence that they were accepted and respected by their neighbors, rather than on the isolating aspects of being a religious minority. As a man who grew up in the region explained, "My parents' idea of dealing with it was . . . to ignore it, up to a point." But only "up to a point": in numerous ways, as individuals and through communal activity, coalfield Jews attempted to sensitize their Christian neighbors to their presence and educate them in order to dispel misperceptions and prejudices. Placing articles in local newspapers was only one strategy. The following section will explore the social ramifications of Jewish "apartness"—in religion as well as in other areas—and the different ways Jews responded to their minority status.[71]

Contradictions and Ambiguities

Certainly not all gentiles were insensitive to the feelings of Jews. A woman who grew up in Pineville, Kentucky, in the 1920s as the only Jewish child in her class recalled that her teacher would find some slight errand to send her on every Monday morning. Eventually she discovered that after she left the room, the teacher took the opportunity to instill proper habits of churchgoing in the remaining students by asking those who had attended Sunday school the

previous day to raise their hands. “She didn’t want to embarrass me,” the woman explained. The teacher’s respect for her student’s religious beliefs was not uncommon. Despite aspects of their church’s teachings that came down hard on Jews, most local Christians chose the more tolerant side of their religious tradition and took a neighborly approach to the small Jewish population in their midst. Some non-Jews easily resolved the contradictions inherent in Christian dogma concerning Jews: as one Christian woman stated simply, “We all believe in the same God.”[72]

But all contradictions cannot be so easily resolved. The teacher mentioned above, in her very sensitivity and her sincere desire to treat her Jewish student with respect, had singled out the girl and made her feel different from the others. The story demonstrates how, even with the good will of the majority, the emphasis on religion in coalfield life inevitably set Jews apart. Such incidents happened often enough to make Jews aware of their separation from the mainstream and to entertain doubts about their place within coalfield society.

If expressions of respect toward Jews had paradoxical ramifications, the rare instances when they encountered rejection or animosity also were not clear-cut. Where anti-Jewish sentiment did exist, it was usually hidden beneath the surface. As one man put it, “We felt and saw prejudice, but it wasn’t overt.” At times it emerged in unthinking comments made by non-Jews, as in the use of the phrase “jew him down.” The inadvertent insult was exemplified by Harry Schwachter’s friend when he apologized to Schwachter for having previously assumed he was “a damn Jew.” Similarly, a man interviewed by Jerome David recounted, “A fellow businessman told me: ‘You’re a good Jew. I always heard Jews were ‘kikes’—but you’re a good Jew.’”[73]

Some of David’s respondents believed that schools, organizations, and other entities practiced subtle discrimination. While a few social clubs definitely did ban Jews, at least for awhile, it is difficult to confirm charges of bias made against schools and other institutions; the

evidence is equivocal, entirely a matter for interpretation. The shadowy nature of discrimination served to heighten feelings of uncertainty, so that even where Jews did seem to be welcomed, some had their doubts. One man told David, "A Jew in Williamson is accepted on the surface. I think the only reason Jews are accepted into the country club is because they need the Jews financially." Because prejudice was so often submerged it was difficult to ascertain how widespread it actually was—whether it was one teacher, one club member who stood in the way, a substantial minority, or even a majority.[74]

When prejudice did surface, it was relatively mild. The historical record reveals virtually no evidence of aggressive anti-semitism or of strong feelings of hatred against Jews. This does not prove that such feelings did not exist, but if they did, they remain well hidden to the historian—and to coalfield Jews as well.[75] Even what would appear to be a clear case of intolerance and bigotry, the 1920s Ku Klux Klan, cannot be taken as a sign of unadulterated hostility. KKK activities made Jewish families uneasy but did not upset their overall sense of security derived from good relations with their gentile neighbors—including Klan members themselves.

Jews who witnessed the Klan march through their towns when they were children expressed a certain confusion about the experience. As would be expected, the event provoked negative feelings. Yet one woman noted that as she and her father watched a Klan parade in Bluefield, a man in the procession waved at her father in a friendly way as he passed by, calling out, "Hi, Henry!" A Beckley resident recalled seeing in the marching throng, identifiable because of his distinctive peg-leg, a man whom his family had found to be "a wonderful neighbor." A Logan man insisted that the march he witnessed 1928 occurred because of the nomination of Al Smith, a Catholic, for the presidency. Echoing a legend that has been told and retold by chroniclers of southern Jewish history, a 1991 Middlesboro library exhibit on the town's long-gone Jewish

community noted that Jewish families in the 1920s "were on such good terms with their Christian neighbors that members of the Ku Klux Klan used to buy their sheets at the [Jewish-owned] Big Store." A Williamson man also remarked that his parents' store sold sheets to local Klan members, whom the family knew as valued customers. Seeing their neighbors and customers join an organization that was known to espouse anti-semitism (along with other types of bigotry) could only have heightened the sense of ambivalence Jews felt about their relations with gentiles. On the other hand, because Klan members were their cordial neighbors, and not the bullies down the street, they felt confident that at least locally, the KKK meant them no harm. As with the "Christ killer" charge, they found no evidence that Klan activities were aimed at them. If local Klansmen did harbor antagonism toward Jews, they focused their wrath on the distant, symbolic Jewish capitalist rather than their local shopkeeper or next-door neighbor.[76]

Given the ambiguities and contradictions in how coalfield society reacted to the small Jewish population in its midst, it is not surprising that Jews who lived in the region expressed little consensus regarding Jewish-gentile relations. Overall, they stressed a sense of belonging much more than a sense of isolation. Comments such as "we mixed very well" . . . "everybody was friends" . . . "everybody knew everybody's problems" were highly typical. Yet beyond this agreement over the neighborliness of the coalfields and the cordial daily relations that existed on the surface, three different attitudes can be discerned. Many interviewees flatly stated that they experienced no anti-semitism whatsoever, that their relations with non-Jews were uniformly good, that people were judged solely on their behavior and not their background. Their attitude may be summed up by one man's firm comment that "people were people."[77]

Others, notably several participants in David's Williamson study, discerned an undercurrent

of anti-semitism that colored their opinion of all non-Jews. Mixed signals from the majority led one person to remark, "If they are friendly, you get the feeling that it is because they consider you different from most Jews. . . . It's a gut feeling." Another stated, "Even now, with all our non-Jewish friends, I am sure there is underlying hostility." A third went even further: "A lot of Jews in this town are fooled into believing they have non-Jewish friends." These harsh comments reflected a minority viewpoint, both among the participants in the Williamson study as well as among the entire sample of coalfield Jews considered here.[78]

A third group struggled to describe the contradictions that emanated from the surrounding environment and that they had internalized, producing varying degrees of ambivalence. They understood their relations with non-Jews as largely positive, their membership in the coalfield middle class as secure. At the same time, they realized their estrangement from the majority and recognized that some members of mainstream society, perhaps even society as a whole, looked upon them as "other." They saw themselves, in other words, as both insiders and outsiders. One man who affirmed that his family "never had a difficult time because we were Jewish" also noted that he made sure that people knew of his Jewish identity partly so that he would not be subjected to any unwelcome surprises such as the comment that Harry Schwachter received from his friend. Another man, whose Presbyterian and Catholic childhood pals remained his best friends throughout his life, nevertheless declared that people who said there was no anti-semitism in the coalfields were "liars."[79]

Rather than choose among these three viewpoints to come to a conclusion about coalfield Jewish-gentile relations, it would be more appropriate to recognize that they each contain their own truths. The divergent perceptions stem from several factors, including differences in experience, in upbringing, in outlook. Some people encountered more prejudice than others.

Attitudes toward Jews might have shifted over time; as Jews became a smaller percentage of the population and less of a visible community presence (especially from the late 1950s on, including the period covered by David's study), they may have experienced greater isolation. Where they lived within the region definitely played a role. Jews raised in McDowell County, home of the most well-integrated Jewish population, had the most positive attitude. Those from the more hierarchical county seat towns were more ambivalent. (One of David's respondents remarked that "anti-semitism is more marked among upper-class Christians.") On the other hand, in the more rural, less sophisticated towns, Jews were more of an oddity and sometimes felt their uniqueness in uncomfortable ways. But even within a single town—Williamson, which offers the most data—perceptions differed. Some dismissed instances of prejudice as unimportant, the actions of "a small group," exceptions in a climate of acceptance; others looked on such cases as "the tip of the iceberg," representative of the true feelings of the gentile majority.[80]

The submerged, indefinite nature of anti-Jewish sentiment encouraged a multiplicity of interpretations and make all seem plausible. But Jerome David did find a pattern behind the varying outlooks of Williamson Jews: those with the most positive views tended to be "home-growns" raised in the coalfields while those with more negative views tended to be "imports" who had moved into town as adults in the immediate post-World War II era. (By the time of his study, the immigrant generation had largely died out.) Most imports came from urban Jewish neighborhoods and had less experience dealing with a non-Jewish majority. Not surprisingly, they exhibited stronger feelings of alienation. Only an import could have told David, "I'm a 'foreigner' because I'm Jewish. Anyone who is not a mountain person is a 'stranger.'" Some coalfield natives saw their co-religionists as paranoid. One commented that "Parents often instill into the child the idea that 'remarks' are anti-Semitic. They misread comments." The

perspectives of each group reflected a bias. Home-growns overlooked or downplayed real instances of anti-semitism while imports saw it where it did not exist. Meanwhile, traditional Jewish distrust of gentiles crept into the views of both groups. Referring to non-Jews the world over, one person stated, "Deep down you don't know how Christians feel about you. Many probably have a deep-seated hatred toward us." This belief found expression in philosophical terms: "There are latent hostilities everywhere in the world toward Jews—also here in Williamson." Another offered the sentiment more crudely: "A goy is a goy."[81]

Not all the separating—nor all the labeling of "other"—came from the majority. References to non-Jews as "goyim" (in statements by home-growns as well as imports) provide a clue that self-segregation was also going on. This was partly a response to gentile attitudes: since they could not be sure how non-Jewish friends viewed them, they felt "more comfortable" around their fellow Jews, some of David's respondents said. But in any case Jews had no desire to completely assimilate. They strove to maintain their identity out of an attachment to their own culture—and also because they found aspects of the dominant culture strange or unappealing. While Christianity and all that went with it served as the major disincentive to full assimilation, some Jews also believed they held certain values and goals that put them at odds with the mainstream.[82] Even those who grew up in the region realized that feelings of difference had internal, as well as external, origins. One woman allowed that, despite having gentile friends in her childhood, "We didn't mingle with the—I guess we had it in us. I wanted to be Jewish, I wanted to know about it." The fear of intermarriage helped reinforce Jewish exclusivity. Its fairly common occurrence offers evidence of the high level of Jewish integration—but the reaction of parents against it marks the limit of Jewish interest in assimilation.[83]

The insularity of some members of the Jewish community led one man to complain, "Aside

from their business, they didn't take an active part in the community. They were here for one purpose—to make a living." Believing that the less-than-stellar behavior of these Jews reflected on the entire group and lent credence to anti-semitic stereotypes, he and other Jews strove that much harder to become involved in the broader community. In this context, Harry Schwachter's comment quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that the building of a temple would "prove . . . our permanency" and show that Jews were not "interlopers" concerned only with making money, reflected not only an internalization of anti-semitic stereotypes, but an awareness that gentiles tended to judge Jews, as a group, by the actions of their least congenial members.[84]

Given the ambiguities in how coalfield society received its Jewish minority and the complex reactions this reception elicited among Jews, Jerome David offers a fitting summation of how Williamson Jews perceived their relations with non-Jews by quoting one thoughtful study participant. David's statement that "most respondents would agree in whole or in part with the following assessment" can be applied not just to Williamson, but to the coalfield Jewish population as a whole: "There is an undercurrent of anti-Semitism here. It is in every town [in America]. It is not as overt as in other places for Jews take an integral part in the functioning of this community. The Jew in Williamson is a powerful force in terms of what he can do."[85]

Perhaps because of a sense of security derived from playing an "integral part" in coalfield society, Jews were not passive in the face of insensitivity or intolerance on the part of gentiles. The balancing act between accommodation with the Christian-dominated culture and maintenance of a strong and positive Jewish identity required an active but measured response to actual or potential instances of anti-semitism or bias. On an individual level, the response could be as simple as letting others know of one's Jewish identity in order to prevent unintended

insults. Or taking time to educate friends and neighbors about Jewish religion and culture; as one woman declared, "I explained Jewishness to the people." (While asserting that the residents of her small town had misperceptions about Judaism, she adamantly denied the existence of anti-semitism, insisting that if she had experienced it, she would have promptly moved away.) One Williamson family whose daughter had been called a "Goddam Jew" by a classmate invited the boy and his parents to their home for a chat. This proved highly effective: as they explained how his action had affected their daughter, "a huge tear slowly rolled down the boy's cheek."[86]

A desire to dispel prejudice and retain the good will of gentiles contributed to the heavy involvement of Jews in civic and charitable activities, as individuals and through their communal organizations. But they also made more direct use of their organizations to promote Jewish-Christian understanding and to educate their neighbors. In the 1950s the Williamson Sisterhood held an annual "Neighbor Night," when each member invited one of their Christian friends to Friday night services. The Welch Sisterhood participated in the Welch United Council of Churches in the late 1940s and early 1950s, although the Williamson Sisterhood bowed out of their local branch in 1947, having decided, according to one leader, that "we have no place in this organization." In the early 1950s the Williamson Jewish youth group sponsored interfaith celebrations of Jewish holidays such as Purim, "at which time non-Jewish youths were invited to witness the lighting of the candles and an abbreviated reading from the Megillah, followed by a discussion period." Both the Logan and Williamson congregations purchased subscriptions to a Jewish monthly magazine for "our local ministers and some of the leading Gentile citizens of the town for the purpose of promoting a Better Understanding" in the 1930s and 1940s.[87]

Jewish communities enlisted their student rabbis and lay leaders in representing their religion and their congregations to the public. These representatives spoke at high school

graduation ceremonies, at churches, at club meetings. Pharmacist-and-rabbi Isadore Wein recalled that "I became a very busy guy, talking to groups" after his arrival in Beckley in the late 1940s. He explained, "We had to make ourselves part of this community, and worked at it." In 1950 the Welch Sisterhood minutes recorded that "our rabbi gave a most inspiring talk on our local radio for the McDowell Woman's Club." This young man was topped by a Williamson student rabbi, who had his own weekly radio program, "Hear, Oh Israel," in the early 1950s. Sociologists have termed such activities the "ambassadorial" approach to Jewish-gentile relations; throughout small-town America, Jewish communities have called on certain members to represent their religion and their collectivity to the surrounding society.[88]

Occasionally Jews took communal action against specific problems or threats. In towns with a relatively large Jewish presence, they could assert themselves with confidence. According to a (non-Jewish) woman who grew up in 1920s and 1930s Pocahontas, Virginia, the KKK scheduled a parade one day at the same time a cornerstone was being laid for a new church. Even though the two events were unconnected, "When the Jewish people saw some of the Ku Klux marching, they never made any donations and the church never did get built." Jews in the county seat towns were more circumspect, but nevertheless responded when they felt their interests threatened. In 1940, the Logan congregation sent a letter to the county school superintendent protesting the practice of "segregating" children into different religious groups to teach them their respective religions. The letter made reference to traditional American values of religious freedom and the separation of church and state, insisting that religious education should take place in the church "where it really and properly belongs." When the Williamson Rotary Club in 1947 had a speaker from the Arabian League "who told them the Arabian side of the story on Palestine," the local B'nai B'rith chapter decided "it would be a good idea to tell them our side." The chapter's

minutes for March 1944 cryptically record that "Sid Goodman reported on some anti-semitic activities in the county and some in town that were well taken care of."[89]

As this last item suggests, the congregations preferred behind-the-scenes action to public protest. They placed definite limits on their defense of Jewish rights, believing that a too-aggressive approach could backfire. In discussing Bluefield's policy of mandatory Bible classes in the public schools, one Jewish leader perfectly expressed the dilemma:

> We never could have gone to court about Bible in the schools. We would have won, there's no doubt about that, but in the end, what would it have done for us? We'd be stabbing ourselves in the back. Many of us here make our livelihood as businessmen and the majority of our customers are Gentiles. We can't afford to ostracize ourselves from the Gentiles.[90]

Politics of A "Middleman" Role

The relationship between Jews and non-Jews was not merely an important aspect of Jewish social life, it was critical to the economic well-being of their families. Merchant-based Jewish communities could not have survived without the patronage of gentile customers. In coalfield towns where everyone knew everyone else, retailers could not afford to alienate any segment of the population. The Jews' economic niche, therefore, guided their actions in the social and political arenas. As a Jewish merchant put it, "We tried to get along with everyone."

This did not prevent some Jews from indulging in stereotypes of their own. One man wryly commented, "Jews can be as prejudiced as any group of people." As town-oriented members of the middle class, some deprecated coal miners (or "mountain people" in general) as violent or ignorant. Others absorbed the racist notions about blacks that were prevalent in white society. However, most Jews had both sympathy and respect for coal miners and their families, an attitude reinforced by the buyer-seller relationship, their primary mode of contact. In interviews,

"hard working" and "honest" were the terms most often used to characterize coal miners. As merchants who extended credit to their customers, they were especially impressed by the determination of local families to pay off their debts despite frequent economic hard times.[91]

The lack of a Jewish presence in the working class did not prevent Jews from relating well with coal miners and other members of the industrial labor force. Whether bantering with their customers in their stores or acting as neighbors and fellow participants in the day-to-day activities of small town life, their relations with the vast majority were good. On the whole, stereotypes held by Jews and non-Jews did not prevent people from getting along with each other. In the multicultural coalfields, differences both real and perceived were noted in all groups, and then generally overlooked, in the interest of small town harmony.[92]

When it came to controversial issues the situation was trickier. As a distinct ethnic-religious minority that occupied a highly visible economic niche, Jews felt somewhat vulnerable and economically exposed. Like other small town Jewish communities in the same position, they tended to keep a low profile during divisive situations. On matters that directly concerned them, such as incursions of Christianity into the public schools, this meant pursuing their interests quietly, behind the scenes—or simply adjusting to the status quo. On contentious matters that did not directly concern them, it meant staying away from the extremes to avoid alienating any faction. Of course, this presented problems in a region known for periods of intense class polarization. Yet their "middleman" economic role pushed Jews toward the middle ground, where, in the coalfields, there was often not a lot of room.[93]

> If you go to Harlan County / There is no neutral there.
>
> You'll either be a union man / Or a thug for J. H. Blair.
>
> — Florence Reece, "Which Side Are You On"

Their lack of direct involvement in the coal industry did not insulate Jews from the fierce conflict between miners and operators that periodically wracked the region. Strikes, of course, could be devastating for local retail businesses. But aside from the economic consequences, Jewish merchants, like everyone else, had to face the social and political ramifications of class conflict. Their economic niche ensured that they felt their own special kind of discomfort during times of labor turmoil. On the one hand, as self-made business people, they cherished their middle class status and had a financial stake in the stability of the system. They were coalfield boosters who had become pillars of their communities. They socialized and sometimes had business alliances with other merchants, professionals, people in the upper levels of the coal industry—people characterized by coalfield historians as the "local elite." On the other hand, Jewish businesses depended on good relations with everyone in the community, particularly the coal miners and their families who often made up the bulk of their trade. "We were caught in the middle" during labor disputes, said one Beckley business owner. "These are your customers, you don't want to antagonize them."[94]

But in a region marked by dependence on a single industry, labor conflicts tended toward the extreme. In the early years, when most coal miners lived in company-owned towns, coal operators used their vast powers as employer, landlord, police force, and store owner to crush attempts to organize around issues such as low pay, dangerous working conditions, and unfair labor practices. Faced with this overwhelming and often arbitrary exercise of power, miners responded with violence. After unionization in the 1930s, the animosities of the past continued to mark labor-management relations. Coalfield historians such as John Hevener have pointed out that the region's sole economic focus on the production of coal meant that it lacked a "sizable disinterested middle class to moderate and adjust conflict."[95]

Far from sizable or disinterested, the middle class was small and completely dependent on coal for its survival. Coal industry hegemony, states John Gaventa, enforced "a consensus to the system of industrial inequalities." To deny the legitimacy of coal miners' claims and to maintain a vision of a natural and harmonious social order, elites preferred to think of insurgent miners as unwitting pawns of outside agitators. "The ideology which emerged appealed to the forces of law and order, respectability, and patriotism as opposed to the forces of disorder, anti-religion, and anti-government brought in by the outsider," says Gaventa. In such an environment, "respectable" opposition to the authority of the coal companies could hardly exist. During the Harlan County battles of the 1930s, a minister of an elite congregation who criticized local employers had to be reassigned and hotel owners were afraid to allow union organizers to stay in their hotels.[96]

Their centuries-old commercial niche traditionally gave Jews a built-in economic interest in maintaining the status quo since stability and order are important preconditions for trade. Merchant-based Jewish communities across the U.S. have generally supported measures to advance the rule of law and promote orderly development. The "gun thug" law enforcement methods of the coalfield elite could scarcely be described as the rule of law, but the perceived alternative—lawlessness—hardly beckoned. Moreover, the coal operators' law-and-order message must have resonated with business owners worried that escalated levels of violence during strikes, which mostly occurred in coal camps and mining sites throughout the countryside, would eventually penetrate the county seat towns.[97]

Indeed, during the southern West Virginia mine wars of the early 1920s, one leader of a defense force organized to defeat mobilizing miners claimed that Williamson businessmen with property "were clamoring for protection." While he made this statement to justify coal company

actions, it was probably true that the tense climate, combined with propaganda depicting strikers as violent revolutionaries (or dupes of violent revolutionaries), caused townspeople to fear for the public safety. Throughout the region, especially in the pre-unionization era when any attempt by miners to organize was viewed as anarchistic, the coalfield middle class—white and black, Jewish and non-Jewish—dutifully sided with the coal operators, either actively or tacitly, whenever battle lines were drawn.[98]

Sometimes the call to arms was literal. When Mingo County elites formed a voluntary state police force at the height of the labor troubles in May 1921, they focused their recruitment efforts on Williamson businessmen, professionals, and white collar workers, along with coal company supervisory and office personnel. They deliberately excluded railroad workers, other laborers, and farmers, whose allegiance could not be trusted. They also denied middle class blacks and "foreigners" the opportunity to show their support, opting for "only white men and citizens of the State." (In contrast, the army of miners participating in the Battle of Blair Mountain a few months later would be multicultural and multiracial.) Some two hundred Williamson men volunteered and a committee of town leaders (including an anti-union minister, a lawyer, and a few merchants) reviewed the list to weed out undesirables. Seven Jews answered the call: four merchants, a "real estate man," a theater manager, and a clerk. Like the other volunteers, the Jews who responded were mostly ex-servicemen and members of the American Legion; "patriotism" was a major rallying cry of the organizers.[99]

Yet with at least thirty-five Jewish men residing in Williamson at the time, virtually all business owners or white collar workers, seven participants hardly indicate overwhelming support. In an interview, a Jewish man from Williamson recalled hearing stories about the mine wars, when "they deputized a lot of people" to go fight the miners. His father refused to

participate and later allowed unions to use his theater as a meeting place. (Though when an organizer attempted to unionize his own employees, he told the man "to get the hell out.") Those who did join county seat defense efforts were not necessarily enthusiastic. In Welch, shortly after Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers were murdered on the courthouse steps in August 1921, rumors that miners were planning to march on the town spurred the American Legion to organize a "Home Guard" and the chamber of commerce to form a "Merchant's Patrol" to guard the business district. A Jewish Welch native related that his father, along with just about all the other men in town, was deputized and issued a firearm even though he knew nothing about guns and had little intention of ever firing one. Only one Jewish man could be found who expressed real devotion to the cause: Sam Solins served as a "captain" in a McDowell County American Legion contingent that traveled to Logan in August 1921 to help Sheriff Don Chafin keep the union miners out. He later wrote an account of the ensuing events on Blair Mountain for his American Legion chapter. However, he was not a merchant, but possibly the only Jewish lawyer in the coalfields at that time. He was also an aspiring politician.[100]

The dynamics outside of county seat towns were quite different, and the actions of Jews who lived beyond reach of the elite consensus offer somewhat of a contrast. The region's small independent towns had many coal miners living in them, and their fellow residents tended to be sympathetic to their cause. Since these towns were not owned by the coal companies, they often became headquarters for union organizing efforts, small islands of union support in a coal industry-dominated sea. Two Jewish families lived in the most controversial independent town of all. The Bermans and Schaeffers owned the only two clothing stores in Matewan at the time of the 1920 Matewan Massacre. According to Harry Berman, his family was well-liked, and "in with the union people" partly because his father "carried them on the books" when they were

unable to pay for goods while out on strike. The Schaeffers earned the suspicion of Baldwin Felts agents for closing their store several hours before the shoot-out and later fraternizing with union sympathizers. (The agency's investigation into the event referred to Joe Schaeffer and Jacob Berman as "Jew merchants"; to try to get information out of Berman, an operative sent "a Jew friend" to question him.) But although they may have associated with the other side, the Bermans and Schaeffers, like Jews in the county seat towns, were uneasy bystanders to the conflict—if a lot closer to it: the sixteen-year-old Harry Berman, loitering on the street, witnessed the shoot-out. Both families left town shortly afterward.[101]

While coalfield historians stress the polarized nature of labor disputes, depicting in stark terms how coal miners and operators faced each other, Jews who grew up in the region recalled their families' attempts at neutrality during times of trouble. A Logan man stated that his parents were "very careful to try not to be involved. My dad had a business where he was dependent on coal miners." Another man expressed the firm belief that "Jews weren't involved in any way." Although as members of the coalfield middle class they never challenged the prevailing "consensus," they were not blind to the region's "system of industrial inequalities." Many expressed a keen awareness of the exploitative nature of the coal industry. As one man acknowledged, "Coal operators treated coal miners atrociously." A man who car-peddled in the southern West Virginia coal camps in the 1930s recalled that coal companies "cheated the hell out of the miners. . . . Most of the time we sympathized with the miners, because the coal companies used to take advantage of them. It was difficult to believe the things they would pull." Companies "got better control over the miners" by engaging in unfair practices—and scrip, he added, was "one of the biggest robberies in the country." His own business benefited from unionization since coal companies did not appreciate the presence of peddlers in the camps. "If it

wasn't for the United Mine Workers, we couldn't have done anything," he observed.[102]

The literature on coalfield class dynamics depicts the middle class as an unquestioning follower of the coal industry's lead because of its weak and dependent status. However, the experience of Jewish merchants suggests that even though the county seat middle class sided with the forces of "law and order" when called upon, its members were in a more ambivalent position than has generally been recognized. Furthermore, as retailers, they did not share the industry's interest in keeping wages low, since an increase in miners' purchasing power could only benefit them. From that standpoint, unionization and union campaigns for higher wages promised material gain to store owners. Mostly, Jewish merchants saw labor conflicts as bad for business and wished them resolved as soon as possible. Although Jews constituted a small portion of the coalfield middle class, all the region's merchants were in the same basic socioeconomic position and this stance toward labor troubles may have been fairly widespread. An article in the *Williamson Daily News* that appeared just after the Matewan Massacre hints at such a view. Making no reference to either side, it simply states, "All of our businessmen are deeply concerned over our labor troubles and want to see them quickly ended."[103]

Anyone familiar with southern Jewish history will have noted the parallels between the Jewish stance toward labor relations in the coalfields and the Jewish stance toward race relations in the rest of the South. As an economically vulnerable minority welcomed into the white middle class, Jews accepted and adhered to South's racial norms. Nevertheless, they maintained good relations with African Americans, who constituted an important customer base. A 1960 study found that this socioeconomic position led southern Jews to hold moderate stances on most issues. They were more liberal than other southern whites, more conservative than other Jews. [104]

During the civil rights movement southern Jewish communities felt caught in the middle. Pressure to conform to the white southern consensus increased, and Jews responded by trying to remain uninvolved in the fray (with exceptions on both sides, including a few businessmen who joined White Citizens' Councils and a few rabbis who spoke out for black civil rights). Southern Jews did not react well to the appearance of northern Jewish civil rights workers, whom they thought would bring the wrath of white gentiles down upon them. (It would be interesting to know how Harlan's Jewish community reacted to the Jewish labor organizers who arrived with the Communist-backed National Miners Union to organize the Harlan coalfield in the early 1930s. One Jewish organizer, the popular Harry Simms, was murdered during the campaign.) Some people got involved in politics, but their activities often made other Jews uncomfortable, especially during times of heightened tensions. For example, several "alarmed" members of the Durham, North Carolina, Jewish community begged Eli Evans's father to reconsider his decision to run for mayor in the 1950s. He refused, won the election, and became a popular, long-serving mayor who guided the city through the era of desegregation.[105]

Individual Jews in the coalfields did not shy away from politics, but in a departure from the southern pattern, their activities did not cause any particular anxiety within their communities. Although merchants may have tried to avoid taking sides in labor conflicts, coalfield Jews did not seem to fear that the general public would react negatively to the ethnic background of Jewish politicians, or would hold the Jewish community responsible for the actions of public officials who happened to be Jews. The two known cases where Jewish public officials did get caught up in controversy suggest that their assessment was correct.

During his term as Middlesboro mayor in the mid-1930s, Ike Ginsburg battled southeastern Kentucky's powerful private utility company and at one point attempted to switch the city over

to TVA power. The utility fought back by cutting off municipal electric service for weeks at a time, causing darkened streets and dark, unventilated public buildings. This chaotic situation, in addition to corruption charges, doomed Ginsburg's term. The *Middlesboro Daily News* had heralded his election in 1933 by noting that the new mayor, "one of the most popular business men of the city for many years, having come here in the early days as a clerk" had risen to become "an important factor in the city's commercial life" and was "rounding out a career of forty years as a citizen . . . by being mayor of his beloved city." The same (anti-TVA) newspaper ended up supporting a lawsuit against the mayor and other city officials filed by a civic group in 1937. Ginsburg's pro-TVA stance also put him at odds with area coal operators and neither he nor other city officials who served with him ran for reelection. The fact that Ginsburg was Jewish did not seem to be an issue.[106]

As mayor of Jellico, Tennessee, in the 1950s, Melvin Sturm became a focus of hostility during an attempt by the UMWA to organize strip miners. After union members began accosting non-union coal trucks within the town limits, forcing them to dump their coal onto the street, Sturm announced at a City Council meeting that he would not tolerate violence and would call out the militia if the practice continued. His remarks garnered headlines in the local newspaper and angered union miners. His store was picketed and rumors circulated that his home would be dynamited. On one occasion, some two hundred miners entered the store and walked through the aisles in a silent protest. "There was a lot of tension," recalled Sturm. "But at no time was there any comment about 'that Jewish mayor'," though everybody in town knew he was Jewish. After the strike ended, he suffered no repercussions from his stand.[107]

Jewish participation in coalfield politics, however, was never very extensive and mostly uncontroversial. Politically active Jews tended to support policies that advanced the interests of

small business owners and civic boosters. They were pro-municipal development and anti-prohibition; they supported governmental reform.[108] Some Jews occupied elected and appointed positions in municipal and county government and a handful served in the state legislature. From the 1910s to the 1960s at least seven served as mayors. Others worked in local political machines as minor party officials and volunteers, and there is sketchy evidence to suggest that one or two wealthy Jewish businessmen became behind-the-scenes power brokers. Yet none achieved real political prominence in a region where politics were strictly controlled by the coal industry.[109]

The height of Jewish political activity came in the 1912 West Virginia gubernatorial campaign, when Jews from the southern coal counties led in the creation of the statewide West Virginia Hebrew League, ostensibly formed to "advance the welfare of the Hebrews in West Virginia," but actually a vehicle to support the election of Henry Hatfield, longtime McDowell County resident and "staunch friend and champion" of the county's Jewish community. The *McDowell Recorder* gave extensive coverage to the League, reporting that a Welch banquet attended by the candidate, the then-current governor, and various Republican notables was "unique in the extreme. It is the first instance we have ever heard of when the Jews gave a feast or a banquet in honor to a Gentile or to Gentile guests." Upon his election, Hatfield awarded two of the League's officers, Joe Lopinsky and Harry Bank, the honorary title of "colonel."[110]

Conclusion

Jews in the coalfields experienced two realities. On a daily level, they lived alongside gentiles as friends, neighbors, classmates, contributors to their small communities. They were the local shopkeeper, the fellow PTA member—a prosaic, everyday, normal part of coalfield life. They blended in as one small group among many other groups of various backgrounds, in a

region where, for the most part, ethnic differences were not considered all that important. And yet that other reality occasionally intruded. Jews were different. They were considered by others to be representatives of an exotic culture whose wedding customs "bespoke times long gone by." They were received in *almost* all the social clubs. They were related to the grocer, "Harry the Jew." They listened on the radio or sat in the audience as ministers prayed to Jesus and preached on the faults of their ancestors. And they watched from the sidelines as their neighbors marched by wearing the robes of the Ku Klux Klan.

In turn, Jewish coalfield residents expressed a range of attitudes toward the surrounding society. While some attempted to isolate themselves, most responded to the relative openness of the coalfield environment by integrating into the middle class and entering fully into the life of the region. This approach did not prevent them from recognizing undercurrents of non-acceptance, or from feeling discomfort—even anger—over ways the majority Christian culture intruded into their lives. They employed a variety of strategies to deal with the dilemmas posed by their minority status. Often, they chose to overlook uncomfortable situations, preferring to focus instead on the positive aspects of their relations with non-Jews. Sometimes, they actively addressed problematic tendencies in the gentile majority through individual or communal attempts to educate and sensitize their neighbors. Always, they could draw sustenance and comfort from their Jewish communities, their primary (but not only) social connection.

The stance of coalfield society toward its Jewish population and the reaction this stance elicited among Jews reflected one variation in a range of American patterns in Jewish-gentile relations in the nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries. On the whole, "ambivalence is the appropriate word" to describe how Jews were received in communities across America, says historian Jonathan Sarna. Yet beyond this broad statement, scholars offer contrasting

assessments. American anti-semitism has always tended to be insidious rather than open, leaving the thorny and contentious issue of how important it actually has been to the Jewish experience. Social exclusion, economic and educational discrimination, ideological attacks, and (more rarely) physical violence against Jews have all been documented at various times and places. Whether these problems represent aberrations in an overall benign climate, or a disturbing pattern that reveals the dark underside of majority attitudes toward Jews, has been a matter of fierce debate. Interestingly, this historiographical quandary reflects the quandary faced by coalfield Jews in attempting to characterize their relations with their gentile neighbors. Most came down on the positive side of the issue.[111]

Even as they grappled with these dilemmas, Jews in the coalfields acted from a position of confidence that contrasts with many small town Jewish communities, North and South. As described by Ewa Morawska, the Jews of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, displayed a "collective insecurity" that caused them to attempt to remain inconspicuous to the larger society, not just during periods of labor turmoil in the steel industry, but always. Anxious about how gentiles perceived them, their "preferred approach" was to avoid attracting attention. Meanwhile, commentators have viewed southern Jewry from two opposite extremes: they have stressed the welcome reception Jews received and their high degree of participation in civic life (in 1955, Harry Golden even asserted that "this 'most Gentile' section of America has provided the most favorable 'atmosphere' the Jewish people have known in the modern world")—yet, as Leonard Dinnerstein points out, these same writers have delineated the powerful fears and anxieties exhibited by southern Jews, suggesting that "the fear of anti-semitism is pervasive." Writers who have depicted southern anti-semitism as relatively insignificant have not denied the existence of such anxieties, but give them less weight, putting them in the overall context of the enormous

pressures to conform imposed on everyone in the region.[112]

While the coalfields shared many characteristics with the rest of the South (such as the centrality of religion and, to some extent, racial attitudes), the openness to outsiders that characterized the coal boom, as well as the coalfields' greater diversity, limited the intense obligation to conform that historians have described as endemic to southern society. This atmosphere, combined with their position as an important segment of the small coalfield middle class, enabled them to confront (or ignore) problems arising from their minority status without the fear or insecurity exhibited by some other small town Jewish communities. Not that there was no pressure at all to adhere to the coalfields' prevailing middle class standards of thought and behavior. Jewish immigrants were accepted as long as they did not appear "too Jewish." No doubt, determining what was "too Jewish" caused confusion for some, and made opportunities to relax around fellow Jews all the more important. Moreover, on one particular issue consensus was strictly enforced: labor relations. Yet the variety of ways Jews interacted with non-Jews, the choices open to them, and the very differences in how they interpreted their relations with the gentile majority, all suggest the fluid nature of the coalfield social environment, as far as the insiders/outsiders of the middle class were concerned.

Notes to Chapter 6

[1] Marilou S. Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee," 1963 (unpublished manuscript, Williamson Public Library, Williamson, W.Va.), 93.

[2] Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 93. According to Leonard Rogoff, sensitivity on this issue caused Jews across the South to see their synagogues in the same symbolic way that Schwachter did. He states, "A synagogue declared that Jews as a wandering people were neither aliens nor economic parasites but neighbors who were at home." "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81 (quote, 48).

[3] In 1870, the five West Virginia counties that this study focuses on (Fayette, McDowell, Logan/Mingo, Raleigh) had a total black population of only 236. The McDowell County census that year recorded no African Americans at all. By 1880 the number of blacks in those counties had risen to just over thirteen hundred, with almost the entire increase in Fayette County, the only county where the industrialization process had begun. U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population* (Washington: GPO, 1890).

[4] Ken Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917," *West Virginia History* 34 (January 1973): 141-161 (quote, 157); Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987); Margaret Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia: Catholics in the Coal Camps, 1900-1940," *Appalachian Heritage* 6 (1978): 43-56; Doug Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County, 1910-1930," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 86, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 119-141; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, Senate docs. 633, 61st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington: GPO, 1911), 219-221, 151-161 (1908 figures).

The 1908 percentages include Mingo, Logan, McDowell, Raleigh, Fayette, and Mercer Counties, W.Va., and Tazewell County, Va. Eastern Kentucky was not surveyed by the Immigration Commission since its coal lands had yet to be developed and immigrant labor was not yet present.

[5] U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 159; U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population, 1910*. Since many black and immigrant workers were unaccompanied by families, their percentage in the workforce was considerably higher than in the overall population.

[6] John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On? The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 3-4 (quote); Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County." Native white miners predominated in Harlan County coal camps, but Italians, Hungarians, and Slovaks were scattered throughout the county and the U.S. Steel coal mining workforce at Lynch was almost entirely made up of Eastern Europeans. U.S. Census Bureau, Harlan County Manuscript Census, 1920.

[7] The "great majority" of Appalachia's immigrants settled in West Virginia, plus Harlan and Letcher Counties, Kentucky, and Tazewell and Wise Counties, Virginia. Randall G. Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis: Industrializing Society on the Central Appalachian Plateau, 1860-1913" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983), 108. Jews settled primarily in the counties of southern West Virginia, but also in Tazewell and Wise in Virginia, Harlan and Bell in Kentucky: almost exactly the same pattern.

[8] Edward Eiland, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Logan, W.Va., 28 May 1996; Sylvan Bank, phone interview with author, 4 March 1998; Sam and Harvey Weiner, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 8 November 1996; Ira Sopher, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; Martha

Albert, interview with author, 8 November, 1996. The perceived buying habits of other "outside" groups might have played a role in Jews' assessment of business prospects (and thus their settlement patterns). In an interview, one retired Jewish merchant remarked, rather obscurely, "towns without Jews or niggers, there's never any business in these towns." He could not elaborate on this comment.

A Jewish man from Williamson observed that the nearby county seat of Pikeville, Kentucky, never developed a Jewish community because Jews "couldn't get a store" there. He was not referring to direct discrimination, but to an insular environment that was not open to outsiders. Despite its coal-related growth, Pikeville had a homogeneous native white population because of the relative lateness of its development and the difference in its rail connections. As discussed in chapter 2, the railroad was a key determinant in Jewish settlement; West Virginia's rail lines were much more accessible to Jewish immigrants on the eastern seaboard than Kentucky's. This also may have influenced the ability of other immigrants to reach various coalfields (or the ability of coal operators to import them), and helps explain why southern West Virginia had a much larger immigrant population than eastern Kentucky.

[9] Ethnic demographics come from the 1900, 1910, and 1920 Manuscript Census for Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mingo, and Raleigh Counties, W.Va.; Tazewell and Wise Counties, Va.; Bell and Harlan Counties, Ky. See also U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*. The terms to describe ethnic groups are taken from the census; some are considered antiquated today.

[10] As many as half of the foreign-born coal miners returned to Europe during World War I (Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 131). In 1940, blacks made up 16 percent of the population in five southern West Virginia coal counties. Fifty years later, they made up 7 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population*, 1940, 1990). See also Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County"; Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Appalachia"; and "Black Migration to Southern West Virginia, 1870-1930," *Goldenseal* 5, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1979): 30-31, on immigrant and black out-migration. See Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 143, on the region's "polyglot culture," a term he takes from a contemporary newspaper article.

[11] Few in-depth studies of coalfield ethnic groups have been conducted, though historians have discussed, in a general way, the impact of ethnic diversity in the region. See Ronald L. Lewis, "Appalachian Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Coal, Culture, and Social Change in West Virginia," *Urban Studies* 30, no. 2 (1993): 299-308 (quote, 301); Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County" (quote, 121); Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia"; Yvonne Snyder Farley, "To Keep Their Faith Strong: The Raleigh Orthodox Community," and "One of the Faithful: Asaff Rahall, Church Founder," *Goldenseal* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 43-53; Joe William Trotter Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); James T. Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1933).

[12] Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Appalachia," 52-53; Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County," 132; Farley, "To Keep Their Faith Strong."

[13] This one-sentence characterization of coalfield society is admittedly sketchy. It is difficult to find sources that are both reliable and willing to say something definite on the topic of what constitutes Appalachian culture. Older studies rely on stereotypes and preconceived notions while newer works, in trying to avoid stereotyping, shy away from any kind of conclusive statement at all about Appalachian culture(s). Recently more work has been done on what Appalachia is not rather than what it is. Chad Berry spells out the dilemma in "Upon What Will I Hang My Hat in the Future? Appalachia and Awaiting Post-Postmodernity," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 6 (2000): 121-130. Yet, as historian Seth Wolitz points out, immigrants assimilate not to a general American experience, but to a particular locale, with its

own variation on American culture. "Bifocality in Jewish Identity in the Texas-Jewish Experience," in Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1999), 185-208. So it was thought necessary to make at least a stab at an overarching definition of coalfield culture.

[14] Edna Moore Drosick, interview with author, Pocahontas, Va., 26 April 1998; Virginia Strange Kiser, *Memories of Pocahontas* (Bluefield, W.Va.: H. E. Kiser Jr., 1998); Reva Totz Hecker, interview with author, Baltimore, 5 November 1998; Manuel Pickus, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 18 May 1998; Christine Carr McGuire, phone interview with author, November 1998; Mary Marsh Ofsa, phone interview with author, 26 March 1999; Gail Bank, phone interview with author, 4 October 1998.

Mary Ofsa of Keystone, daughter of a native Protestant mother and an Irish-Catholic father, was raised a Baptist before marrying into a Jewish family. In the 1990s she would send her matzo ball soup over to the local Catholic priest whenever he took ill. A one-woman representative of coalfield multiculturalism, for fifty years she played the organ for Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, and Methodist services around Keystone.

[15] Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County," 141. On the lingering of ethnic influence in the coalfields see for example memoirs and articles in West Virginia's folklore magazine *Goldenseal*, such as Stuart McGehee, "Gary: A First-Class Operation" (Fall 1988): 28-32; and Farley, "To Keep Their Faith Strong." Interviews with coalfield non-Jews revealed the influence of Hungarian and German foodways and traditions in families that otherwise seemed to be completely "native" Appalachian. Drosick interview; Billie Rakes, interview with author, Oak Hill, W.Va., 12 October 1996.

[16] Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County," 137; Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 60; Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 152; Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis," 112; Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 131, 151-152; Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia;" Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*.

[17] Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis," 115; Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia," 47; "Assyrians in Court," *Fayette Journal*, May 30, 1901; "Attacked by Russians," *Bluefield Telegraph*, January 5, 1915; "A Secluded Spot," *Raleigh Register*, February 20, 1908.

[18] "Near Riot in Anawalt, White Men Assault an Italian and Injure His Wife, Trouble Starts in Saloon, Police Chief Alleged to Have Led Mob," *McDowell Times*, May 16, 1913; "Near Tragedy at Depot: Agent Attacked by Italians," *McDowell Times*, May 23, 1913.

[19] Among miners and their families, experiences that forged multicultural cooperation included hardships on the job and in the coal camps as well as injustices perpetrated more or less equally on all groups by the coal companies. Shared rural backgrounds and similar adaptive strategies to industrial conditions also contributed to working class cohesion. Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County," 135; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 402, 466; Lewis, "Appalachian Restructuring" and *Black Coal Miners in America*; David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

[20] Edward Eiland, interview with author, Logan, W.Va., 19 May 1998. Unlike other groups, Jewish ethnicity and religion went hand-in-hand. Catholics comprised many different ethnic groups, so people could socialize or marry inter-ethnically while remaining within their faith. Alternatively, some ethnic groups supported more than one religion (such as Hungarians and Germans), so people could associate with members of other faiths within their own ethnicity.

[21] Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*; Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*; John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

[22] J. G. Bradley, "The Coal Operator and the Miner—A Partnership," Address to the West Virginia Coal Mining Institute (West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.); Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 143; "N&W District Is Grossly Libeled," *McDowell Recorder*, February 9, 1912, p. 1.

[23] "Our Faithful Italian Friends," *McDowell Recorder*, October 18, 1918; "Syrians Prove Loyal," *McDowell Recorder*, November 1, 1918; Frank Kneeland, "Patriotic Demonstration at Gary, W.Va.," *Coal Age* 11, no. 19 (1917): 826. On how local and national industrial leaders used the war to engineer public acceptance of business-oriented values by promoting "industrial Americanism," see John C. Hennen Jr., *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

[24] "Flat Top Coal Field: Advantages Offered Laborers," *McDowell Times*, May 30, 1913; "Operators Know No Color Line," *McDowell Times*, September 26, 1913. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 121; Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*. According to Trotter, coal companies contributed financially to the African American newspaper, thus providing an additional reason for its enthusiasm (54).

In the North, a steady supply of immigrant labor and the opposition of white unions kept blacks out of the working class jobs that allowed native and immigrant whites to advance. In the deep South, a surfeit of black labor and a longstanding system of oppression kept blacks in their place. In the coalfields, the labor shortage created a need for black labor and prevented operators from fully exploiting racial and ethnic animosities. Meanwhile, the newness of the black population meant that the region lacked the mechanisms of racial oppression that had been perfected in the deep South. The economic leverage held by blacks enabled them to obtain a greater amount of social and political freedom than elsewhere.

[25] Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 132; "Boost Keystone, Stop Knocking It," *McDowell Times*, January 11, 1918; Anonymous ("A Virginia Lad"), *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day, or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia* (n.p.: 1912).

[26] *McDowell Times*: September 27, 1918; July 7, 1916; February 9, 1917; November 24, 1916; May 12, 1916.

[27] Isadore Scott, phone interview with author, 14 December 1997; Milton Koslow, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 13 May 1998; McDowell County Criminal Court and Circuit Court records, 1909, 1911, McDowell County Courthouse, Welch, W.Va.; "Katzen Trial," *McDowell Recorder*, December 15, 1916; *West Virginia Supreme Court Reports* (January 1918), 492-500; "For Pardon Attorney," *McDowell Times*, July 4, 1913. On Isadore Katzen's murder trial, see chapter 4.

Most studies of small town Jewish communities describe the relationship between Jews and blacks as largely one of merchant and customer. An exception is Leonard Rogoff's essay "Divided Together: Jews and African Americans in Durham, North Carolina," in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, 190-212 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997). Like Keystone but on a larger scale, the New South city of Durham offered a relatively good climate for African Americans compared to the rest of the South, and the city maintained a strong black middle class. Relations between Jews and blacks resembled Keystone's in many ways.

Outside of McDowell County, Jewish-black interaction in the coalfields was much less extensive. African Americans were part of the customer base for Jewish-owned stores, and like most other middle and upper class white southern families, many Jewish families employed African American maids. Otherwise, contact between members of the two groups was minimal. Sylvan Bank, Pickus, Ira Sopher interviews; Sidney Fink, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 12 October 1996; Betty Ofsa Rosen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., 28 May 1996.

[28] Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*; *McDowell Times* and *McDowell Recorder*, various; Jean Battlo, "Cinder Bottom: A Coalfields Red-Light District," *Goldenseal* 20 (Summer 1994): 60-65; Kenneth Bank, interview with author, Baltimore, 6 November 1998; Sylvan Bank, Ofsa interviews.

[29] Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 402, 466, 485; "Boost Keystone, Stop Knocking It."

[30] "Middlesboro History" column, *Middlesboro Daily News*, August 18 (quote), July 20 (quote), June 12, July 26, September 27, April 28, 1990; Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 125. Other sources used to construct this composite description of race relations include: Sylvan Bank, Ofsa, Ken Bank, Scott interviews; Harry and Frances Monroe, interview with author, Bluefield, W.Va., 27 April 1998; William D. Forester, *Before We Forget: Harlan County, 1920 through 1930* (n.p.: 1983), 78-83. On the combination of "cordial relations" and white belief in superiority, Laing is especially instructive.

[31] Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County," 137; Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," 472-479.

[32] Bill J. Leonard, ed., *Christianity in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 266; Rakes interview; Ripley-Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia," 48. According to West Virginia historian Otis K. Rice, "traditions of religious freedom and toleration" in the region carried over well into the twentieth century. *The Allegheny Frontier: West Virginia Beginnings*, 1730-1830 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 378. On the other hand, the idea that Catholics blindly followed the pope and thus could not be loyal American citizens, a mainstay of nineteenth and twentieth century American nativism, apparently seeped in. See John Higham's classic, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 178.

In her memoir of growing up Jewish in a small town in western Tennessee in the 1920s, Stella Suberman relates that her brother's first appearance at grammar school after the family moved to town sparked a theological discussion among his classmates. When one boy welcomed him and expressed elation that a "Jewboy" had come among them, a fellow classmate rebuked him: "You don't have no more upstairs than a field nigger. . . . Don't you know all them Jews is *Catholics*? And everybody knows a Catholic takes his orders from Rome. From the Pope." *The Jew Store* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998), 131-132.

[33] Scott interview. On economic stereotyping and discrimination against Jews, see chapter 3.

[34] Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis," 49-50. On coal operators' views regarding the fitness of various ethnic groups for particular mining jobs, see U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*, 225-228.

[35] "Attacked by Russians," "Masonic Officers Entertained," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 5, 1916.

[36] "Grandpa Herzbrun," *McDowell Recorder*, January 24, 1913; *Middlesboro News*, July 15, 1905, March 23, 1901; "Taps Are Sounded for Col. J. M. Lopinsky," *McDowell Recorder*, January 30, 1914. See also

"Engagement Announced," *Fayette Journal*, April 26, 1906; "Hail Klein, the Benedict," "Col. Bank in Capital City," *McDowell Recorder*, March 10, 1916; "Mannie Shore Says Judge Robinson Will Sure Be Nominated," *McDowell Times*, May 5, 1916; "Jacob Effron: Prominent Middlesboro Merchant Dies of Heart Trouble," *Thousandsticks*, January 2, 1913, p.1.

[37] See David A. Gerber's introductory essay to the volume he edited, *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), for a historiography of American anti-semitism. Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock: Elite Anti-Semitism and the Quest for Moral Order in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Marketplace," in *Anti-Semitism in American History*; Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); John Higham, *Send These To Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Karen Brodkin Sacks, "How Did the Jews Become White Folks?," in *Race*, ed. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 78-102.

Anti-semitism in America never reached the heights it did in Europe since the climate for capitalism was much more favorable here. However, the misgivings that Americans did have about their emerging economic system were often projected onto Jews. Traits generally lauded in capitalist discourse were often twisted into vices when exhibited by Jews. (For example, non-Jews were "thrifty," Jews were "tight"; non-Jews were "ambitious," Jews were "pushy.") As David Gerber states, negative imagery about Jews in the nineteenth century reflected "the ambivalence of the national culture toward materialism and success," even as the nation moved rapidly in a capitalist direction ("Cutting Out Shylock," 224). When Jews found themselves criticized for the very qualities that were praised in others, it left them to wonder if "the national success ethic applied to everyone but them." Jews also continued to provide a ready scapegoat to blame for the damaging effects of capitalism. With avid promoters such as Henry Ford, the idea that the "international Jew" manipulated the economy to the detriment of others was kept alive and well through the mid-twentieth century. (Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 80-83, 102-123.)

[38] *McDowell Recorder*, August 5, 1913 (quote); October 3, 1913; November 7, 1913.

[39] "A True One" and "At the Welch Theater," *McDowell Recorder*, January 3, 1913. See also, "Getting a Raise," March 3, 1916, and an "Irishman and a Jew" joke, January 12, 1912. *McDowell Times,* "Three Great Days," May 15, 1914. The *McDowell Times* in 1917 printed this ditty sent in by an African American soldier: "Young men were made to be soldiers / Irishmen were made to be cops / sauerkraut was made for the Germans / spaghetti was made for the wops / fish were made to drink water / bums were made to drink booze / banks were made to take money / money was made for the Jews." ("What They Were Made For," January 13, 1917.)

[40] On how Jews in America and other western societies have attempted to blend into the surrounding society, and how this process has affected Jewish identity, the literature is vast. Two recent discussions include: Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Gilman and Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier*.

[41] Interviews with current and former coalfield residents, Jewish and non-Jewish, elicited reminiscences about Jake Shore. His litigiousness is amply demonstrated in McDowell County court records, where his name frequently appears as plaintiff. Shore sued U.S. Coal & Coke in 1911, claiming that the company owed him money. Court records do not reveal the grounds for the lawsuit, although Shore's zeal for using the legal system comes through: at one point, "after hearing a part of the evidence, the plaintiff moved the court to permit him to amend his declaration by inserting a new count therein" (the court agreed). Eventually he dropped the suit and each side paid its own costs (McDowell County Circuit Court records, 1911-1912). Around that same time, Shore sued the city of Keystone over damage to his home caused by

a burst water tank a few years earlier. The jury decided against him because "there had already been a settlement of this matter with Shore" (*McDowell Recorder*, June 23, 1911).

[42] *McDowell Times*, January 23, 1914. Paul Baltrop, historian of Australian Jewry, notes the correlation in gentile minds between foreign manners and unscrupulous business practices. In *Jewries at the Frontier*, he is quoted as noting that Anglicized Jews were considered "good Jews" who "in no way stood out from the great anonymous mass of other Australians. 'Bad Jews' were the opposite. They were foreign, exhibited different customs and modes of behaviour, rarely spoke English without an accent . . . and had business principles derived from the eastern European village" (323).

[43] "Marriage of Mr. I. Bloom," *Fayette Journal*, August 8, 1901, p.1; "A Novel Method," *Fayette Journal*, January 24, 1901, p. 1. At the time, there was no law requiring peddlers to be licensed.

[44] "A Novel Method"; Order Book 3, pp. 257, 302, 333, Fayette County Criminal Court records, 1900-1901, Fayette County Courthouse, Fayetteville, W.Va. A grand jury handed down indictments against Harris and House in July, 1900, shortly after the incident occurred, and the first trial took place in January, 1901. One indictment stated that Harris and House "feloniously" injured Joseph by "cruelly tying the hands and feet of him [and placing] him on the public highway in the hot sun for the space of three hours, to be seen by the persons passing by, and did thereby feloniously extort money from [him]."

To confuse the issue, a *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* article (cited by Randall Lawrence in his account of the incident) provides some contrasting—though apparently false—details. It identifies not one but two peddlers as Harris's victims, referring to them as the brothers Solomon and Jacob Ihrig. However, no Ihrigs could be found in Fayette County newspaper accounts or court records. The *Daily Telegraph* added the detail that the peddlers were "taken out of town, tied hands and feet to stakes, and their faces plastered with molasses. In this condition, the sun's rays beating down on their faces, and the molasses attracting flies, ants, etc., they were kept until the torture compelled them to agree to pay." Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis," 116; "Peddlers Told of Torture," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, January 25, 1901.

[45] On July 20, 1905, the *Fayette Journal* reported, "Abraham Joseph, who has been conducting a store over on Plum Orchard which was general headquarters for the Assyrian peddlers in this section, and who left very suddenly a few weeks ago, is reported to have returned to Europe." Manuscript census records show that Joseph was a common last name among the coalfield Arab population, and not among the Jewish population. The peddlers identified in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*'s version of the incident (see above note) do have Jewish names, but no evidence could be found in Fayette County records that the ordeal happened to people with those names.

[46] Ironically, the manuscript census in coalfield counties enumerated more "Syrian" peddlers than Jewish peddlers. In interviews, non-Jewish coalfield residents mistakenly identified merchants of Middle Eastern origin as Jews. One Jewish businessman complained, "There were a lot of Syrian [merchants] too. The Syrians, if they would do something wrong. . . . If someone got a raw deal, they would blame the Jews." Even Jews occasionally got confused; one person told researcher Jerome David that before moving to Williamson, "We looked in the phone book, came across the name 'Abraham', and asked him if there were Jews here—it turned out he was an Arab." "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town: A Sociological Study of Jewish Identification" (M.A. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1974), 18.

[47] William D. Forester, *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties* (n.p.: 1986), 113; Goldie Scott Jaffe, phone interview with author, 30 April 2000; Pickus, Ken Bank, McGuire, Mary Jo Sopher, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 51, 95;

Transcript of William P. Tams, interview with Richard M. Hadsell, 39 (West Virginia and Regional History Collection); Justus Collins Papers (West Virginia and Regional History Collection).

[48] Rakes, McGuire interviews.

[49] Even supposed friends of Southern and Eastern European immigrants believed them to occupy an inferior racial category, as reformer Jacob Riis demonstrated in his 1890 exposé, *How the Other Half Lives*. On popular discourse seeing Jews and other immigrants as non-white, see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Sacks, "How Did the Jews Become White Folks?"; Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (September, 1997): 195-262.

[50] *McDowell Times*, November 12, 1915, and "Mamie Flood is Convicted," November 26, 1915; "Mamie Flood Found Guilty," *McDowell Recorder*, November 26, 1915; "State of West Virginia vs. Mamie Flood," McDowell County Criminal Court files, Box 297, File 3448, McDowell County Courthouse.

[51] Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 38. On the racial standing of Jews in the South see Rogoff, "Is the Jew White?" On the effect of being considered white in southern society, see David Goldfield, "Blacks, Jews, and White Gentiles in the American South," *Southern Cultures* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 58-79; Harry Golden, *Our Southern Landsman* (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974); Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry and Anti-Semitism in the South," *American Jewish History* 77 (March 1988): 437-451; Steven Hertzberg, "Southern Jews and Their Encounter with Blacks: Atlanta, 1850-1915," *Atlanta Historical Society Journal* (Fall 1979): 7-24.

[52] On the return of nativism and anti-semitism after World War I, see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*. The movement culminated in the immigration restrictions passed by Congress in 1924, which targeted Southern and Eastern Europeans. Anti-semitism remained widespread in the 1920s and 1930s. Not until World War II did Jews (and other immigrant groups) become fully "white" in the eyes of mainstream American society. States Karen Brodkin Sacks, "The war against fascism led to a more inclusive version of whiteness. Anti-Semitism . . . lost respectability." It did not disappear, but was "driven underground," where it remains today. "How Did the Jews Become White Folks?," 87.

[53] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 3, 67-68. Goldie Scott Jaffe interview; Betty Schuchat Gottlieb, interview with author, Parkersburg, W.Va., 18 December 1997. Jews had varying reactions to this type of behavior. Some were offended, while others saw it as somewhat humorous and did not take it personally.

[54] Evans, *The Provincials*, 75. Several coalfield Jews observed that gentiles thought Jews were born with horns, echoing many other accounts of southern Jewish life. See for example Louis Schmier, "Hellooo! Peddlerman! Hellooo!," in *Ethnic Minorities in Gulf Coast Society*, ed. Jerrell H. Shofner and Linda V. Ellsworth (Pensacola: 1979), 81. Stella Suberman writes that when she was a baby, her family's African American maid would stroll with her down the streets of their western Tennessee town and:

> smile hugely at passersby, to encourage them to ask whose baby she was minding. As the questions came, she would pick me up and say, "This here my Jew baby," then turn me slowly around to display my head. "See, ain't no horns on this child. Ain't no way to tell she Jerrish"—her way of pronouncing "Jewish"—"unless you knows the family." (*The Jew Store*, 146).

Whether the belief that Jews had horns was really widespread among Christians, or whether it was more of a myth prevalent in Jewish communities, is difficult to determine.

[55] Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Loyal Jones, "Mountain Religion: An Overview," in Leonard, ed., *Christianity in Appalachia*, 91-102. Quotes are from Albanese and Campbell, cited in McCauley 79, 150, 155.

[56] Rose Marino, *Welch and Its People* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Press, 1985), 49; Rabbi Michael Aaronsohn, "Coal, Cotton, and Congregations," excerpted in Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958* (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963), 75-77.

In discussing attitudes about Jews, one coalfield native—raised as a Freewill Baptist—explained that Christ was Jewish and Christianity was first given to the Jews, so "God has got to love the Jew." Furthermore, "When we were saved and become Christian, we become adopted Jews."

[57] Harry Golden, *Jewish Roots in the Carolinas: A Pattern of American Philo-Semitism* (Greensboro, N.C.: *Carolina Israelite*, 1955), 56; Evans, *The Provincials*, 76-77; Schmier, "Hellooo! Peddlerman! Hellooo!," 81, and remarks made at the Southern Jewish Historical Society annual conference, Nashville, October 1998. Interestingly, evidence supporting Schmier's observation that piety was good for the peddling trade comes from a Lebanese (not Jewish) coalfield peddler who used religion as a selling point. "Just make holy for them and they'd buy all from me," he explained. Perhaps people connected him to the Holy Land because of his Middle Eastern background. See Farley, "One of the Faithful."

[58] "Pocahontas Synagogue Dedicated on Sunday," *McDowell Recorder*, July 4, 1913. In 1990 the "Middlesboro History" column reprinted items about local Jewish religious services that appeared in 1903, 1914, 1926, and 1933; quote is from the September 15 column. "Jewish Women Hold Services," *Mingo Republican*, Dec. 3, 1926, p. 1.

[59] "Lipman-Leventhal," January 8, 1915; "Wagner-Totz Wedding a Brilliant Affair," April 7, 1922; "Goodman-Lopinsky," February 12, 1915; "Jewish New Year," October 3, 1913; "Passover Celebrated," April 2, 1915. A 1915 article showed some improvement by referring to "Rosha-Shonnah," though it went on to discuss "the week of atonement, which is called Yom Kippers." ("Jewish New Year," September 3, 1915.) The paper later printed an article correcting this item, accurately explaining (and spelling) Yom Kippur. ("Wednesday Was Jewish New Year 5676," September 10, 1915).

[60] "Sam Polan Goes to School," November 7, 1913; "Was Columbus A Jew," January 2, 1914; "Hurrah for Welch!," May 29, 1914.

[61] "Was Columbus A Jew"; "Sam Polan Goes to School"; "The Jew Acquitted," November 14, 1913; "Jewish Relief Fund Results," January 28, 1916. See also, "The Jew!," November 7, 1913; "Anti-Semitic Demonstration" (in Vienna), October 10, 1919; "Russia and the American Jew," December 15, 1911; "My Arrival in America, Told by a Russian Jewess," a serial in two parts, May 8, 1914.

The *Recorder* had the details of the Mendel Beilis trial mostly right, though he was accused of murdering only one child. The case (which inspired Bernard Malamud's novel, *The Fixer*) caused an international scandal for the tsarist regime. Yet the charge of ritual murder was not unknown in America, popping up as late as 1928 in Massena, New York. In discussing its American manifestations, Leonard Dinnerstein notes that the blood libel "may have been an ancient myth but it has had a powerful hold on people's minds" (*Antisemitism in America*, 101).

[62] "The Frank Case," January 25, 1915 and "Leo Frank Lynched by Mob," August 20, 1915, *McDowell Recorder*. Leo Frank was factory manager in Atlanta wrongly accused of murdering an employee, thirteen

year old Mary Phagan. His conviction aroused a national controversy, and American Jewish leaders rallied to his defense. When the Georgia governor commuted Frank's sentence from the death penalty to life in prison, Frank was captured and lynched by an angry mob. The twentieth-century rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan grew out of the "Knights of Mary Phagan," a vigilante group formed during the episode. See Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Nancy McClean, "The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism," *Journal of American History* 78 (December 1991): 917-948.

[63] "Palestine for the Jews," November 29, 1914, and "Many Jews Enlist with English Army," September 9, 1915, *McDowell Recorder*. See also "The Promised Land," *Welch Daily News*, January 20 1920; "Russian Jews in America," *Fayette Journal*, October 5, 1905 (with facts and figures taken from "The Jewish Encyclopedia" and quotes from Henrietta Szold). On August 8, 1901, the *Fayette Journal* announced the largest advertising contract it had ever made, with the Great Eastern Bargain House chain owned by Hurvitz and Lopinsky.

[64] "Jewish New Year is Observed Here," September 13, 1918; "Rosh Hashanah, Great Hebrew Holiday," October 3, 1913; "Effect of War on the Jews," August 14, 1914; "A Hebrew Philanthropy" (a "splendid project" to "recreate the Holy Land"), January 16, 1914; "Jewish Citizens in Keystone Respond to European Sufferers," January 28, 1916; "Jews Fight Discrimination: Hebrew Protective League Calls on Colored and Italian Citizens To Combine Against Race Prejudice," January 16, 1914; "Jews Resist Race's Discrimination," August 18, 1916; "Jew Nominated," February 4, 1916, p.1; "Jew To Be Governor of Idaho," December 11, 1914, p. 1; "Bravery of the Jew" (about the loyalty of European Jewish soldiers on both sides in World War I), January 8, 1915; S. B. Moon, "Our Adopted Citizens, Jewish People Make Patriotic and Most Desirable Citizens," February 19, 1915, p.1; April 27, 1917; "Black Jews in Abyssinia," July 2, 1915; editorial about the Leo Frank lynching, August 20, 1915.

One interesting article concerned an Ethiopian Jew and Italian subject who became a nobleman and then an American citizen. "Jewish Negro Count is Now an American," August 30, 1918, explained that David Ben Isaac de Kellacrita, who spoke twenty-seven languages, now lived in Milwaukee.

[65] Records, Logan B'nai El Congregation and Harlan B'nai Sholom Congregation (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati).

[66] "Harlan Jews to Observe Rosh Hashanah," September 11, 1931; "Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement," September 18, 1931, both *Harlan County Courier*. "Harlan Hebrew Congregation Prays for Safety of Lindbergh Baby," *Harlan Enterprise*, March 5, 1932.

[67] Isadore Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996; Jaffe interview.

[68] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 52; Emanuel Katzen, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Princeton, W.Va., 30 May 1996; Melvin Sturm, phone interview with author, 4 October 1998; Pickus interview; *McDowell Recorder*, June 6, 1913. Many writers have noted the contradictory stance of fundamentalist Protestantism toward Judaism, with its opposing images of Jews as chosen people and as Christ killers. Although this dual portrayal could perhaps be reconciled within Christian theological discourse, it could also cause confusion and ambivalence toward Jews among people who grew up hearing a mixed message. See Suberman, *The Jew Store*, 109; Goldfield, "Blacks, Jews, and White Gentiles in the American South," 60-61; Evans, *The Provincials*, 117-135. Some historians assert that the premise that "the Jews killed Christ," learned by children in Sunday school at a very early age, effectively lays the groundwork for anti-Jewish sentiment in society at large. See for example Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 99-100.

[69] Bertie Rodgin Cohen, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 6 March 2000; Hecker, Pickus interviews.

[70] Eiland 1996 interview; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 53, 55, 70.

[71] Sylvan Bank, Scott, Pickus, Hecker interviews; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 44.

[72] Jaffe, Ofsa interviews.

[73] Pickus interview; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough," 90; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 69.

[74] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 54, 68-69. Several of David's respondents stated that their children had been denied school honors and opportunities even though they had academically qualified for them. They believed that some teachers and school administrators did not want Jewish students to succeed over non-Jewish students.

[75] Little evidence was uncovered of the perception which historians cite as especially prevalent in rural areas as a sort of degeneration of populist economic thought: that distant Jewish financiers, in control of the economy, are responsible for the problems that befall farmers, the working class, and other common folk. One manifestation of this attitude was found. Sociologist Shaunna L. Scott writes of a Harlan coal miner in the 1980s who blamed the energy crisis of the previous decade (and general manipulation of the economy) on "some of them Jews up in New York City," along with Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, the Rockefellers, and multinational oil corporations. *Two Sides to Everything: The Cultural Construction of Class Consciousness in Harlan County, Kentucky* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 141. Such ideas may very well have been widespread (especially during hard times, when people cast about for reasons for their plight), but if so, they are difficult to document.

An exception to the lack of evidence of blatant anti-Jewish sentiment comes from the oral history collection *Our Appalachia*, where a man who grew up in a Perry County, Kentucky, coal camp is quoted as saying that miners and mountain people in general did not like foreigners. "They kept the tradition [of] the Ku Klux Klan alive to keep the foreigners out, what they called 'Jews,' 'Wops,' and 'Dagos,'" he stated. "The Jews were very much hated people. They peddled goods and mountain people thought anybody [who] wouldn't get out and work by the sweat of his brow and breath was terrible." Whether this man expressed the views of a significant number of people is difficult to determine. Moreover, Perry County did not have a Jewish community, although a few Jews lived there from time to time and Jewish peddlers may have occasionally passed through. This may help explain the attitude of local people; anti-semitism is often more apparent in places where Jews are more mythical than actual (see note below). Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 222.

[76] Cohen, Eiland 1996, Katzen interviews; Lou Mankoff, interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., March 1996; *Righteous Remnant: Jewish Survival in Appalachia* (video-documentary produced by Maryanne Reed, West Virginia Public Television, 1997); panel copy, Middlesboro library exhibit (personal collection of David Weinstein family); Charlie Albert, interview with Maryanne Reed, Williamson, W.Va., 8 August 1995.

The KKK of the 1920s did not generally target Jews and in fact often looked favorably upon their Jewish neighbors, at least in the South. The story of southern Jewish merchants selling sheets to Klan members has achieved the status of legend (see for example Evans, *The Provincials*, 216, 219). The premier

historian of American anti-semitism, Leonard Dinnerstein, concurs that the Klan "focused its hatred primarily on Roman Catholics," blacks, and "errant members of the dominant culture" who transgressed moral codes. He cautions, however, that "no one should think of Klansmen as friends of the Jews," and cites many instances of Klan anti-semitism, mostly in the West (96-98). The "mythical Jew" versus the "Jew next door" has been a distinction often noted by historians of American Jewry, particularly those who focus on the South. See Jonathan D. Sarna's "The 'Mythical Jew' and the 'Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth Century America" for an illuminating analysis (Gerber, ed., *Anti-Semitism in American History*). See also Rogoff, "Is the Jew White?"

[77] Weiner, Koslow, Albert, Fink, Sylvan Bank, Mankoff, Hecker, Ken Bank, Scott interviews; Elaine Bank, phone interview with author, 4 March 1998; Bernard Gottlieb, interview with author, Clarksburg, W.Va., 5 November 1996; Esther Sturm Baloff, interview with Barbara Winick Bernstein and Marilyn Jacob Shore, 20 May 1985, Knoxville Jewish Community Archives Project, Knoxville Jewish Federation, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Interestingly, several men who grew up in the southern West Virginia coalfields stated that their first experience of anti-semitism occurred in the 1930s after they left the region to attend college at West Virginia University, in the northern part of the state. There they encountered discrimination by fraternities as well as hostility from some professors and students.

[78] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 54, 69.

[79] Sturm, Pickus, Hecker, Jaffe interviews; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough."

[80] Six of the thirty people interviewed for this study lived or previously had lived in Williamson. In the early 1970s, Jerome David interviewed eighteen out of Williamson's twenty-four Jewish families, conducting separate interviews with husbands and wives. His study offers a comprehensive snapshot Williamson Jewry at that time. Frank Anthony Fear studied the Jewish communities of Williamson, Bluefield, and Clarksburg, West Virginia for his M.A. thesis, "The Quest for Saliency: Patterns of Jewish Communal Organization in Three Appalachian Small Towns" (West Virginia University, 1972). Also, Marilou Sniderman's memoir of her father, Harry Schwachter, is set in Williamson.

[81] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 52-54, 67-73, 79; Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 118. David's distinction between "home-growns" and "imports" is borne out by interviews conducted for this study in the 1990s. These were held mostly with people who had grown up in the region and elicited, overall, a more positive impression of Jewish-gentile relations than that left by David.

[82] David's respondents identified an interest in the "arts" and in education as values not shared by the broader society. Some also stated that their political views were more liberal than those of non-Jews. One person said, "I have an equal number of Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Yet, Jewish people's viewpoints are more like mine . . . Most non-Jews are non-intellectual, right wing, 'Wallace for President' types. I have to meet them on the level of golf and fun." 52-55, 70, 94-95.

[83] Hecker interview; Jean Abrams Wein, interview with author, Beckley, W.Va., 13 October 1996.

[84] Isadore Wein interview; Sniderman, "Diamond in the Rough."

[85] David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 70.

[86] Baloff interview; David, "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town," 69.

[87] Scott interview; congregational, Sisterhood, and B'nai B'rith records, Logan, Welch, Williamson; Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 1596.

[88] Isadore Wein interview; congregational, B'nai B'rith, and Sisterhood records, Logan, Williamson, Welch; *West Virginia Jewry*, 1292, 1585; Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 20, 30-31.

[89] Drosick interview; congregational and B'nai B'rith records, Logan and Williamson.

[90] Fear, "The Quest for Saliency," 119.

[91] Pickus, Isadore Wein interviews; Isadore Gorsetman, interview with author, Charleston, W.Va., 13 May 1998; Harry Berman, interview with John C. Hennen Jr., Williamson, W.Va., 15 and 28 June 1989 (transcript, Matewan Oral History Project, Matewan Development Center, Matewan, W.Va.), 43.

[92] Monroe, Isadore Wein, Rakes, McGuire, Scott, Sylvan Bank, Baloff interviews; Berman interview transcript, 27.

[93] Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978); Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*; Evans, *The Provincials*.

[94] Scott, Ken Bank, Koslow, Pickus, Jaffe, Ira Sopher, Eiland 1996, Sylvan Bank, Gorsetman interviews. It should be noted that coal miners made up much less of a proportion of the county seat merchants' trade before the 1930s (see chapter 3).

[95] Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 22, 109-110.

[96] Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 81, 110-111; Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1969); Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 109-110. On coalfield labor wars, see also Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia* (New York: Arno Press, 1969 [1921]); and Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*. Howard B. Lee writes that, from the early 1890s until unionization in the 1930s, "McDowell County was a complete industrial autocracy, with every branch of the county government and every phase of the lives of the people dominated by a super-oligarchy of coal operators" (65).

[97] Bernard Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973); Robert E. Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush* (New York: Ktav, 1978), 60-72; Moses Rischin and John Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

[98] *West Virginia Coal Fields: Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, 67th Congress, First Session* (Washington: GPO, 1921), 339. Black middle class endorsement of coal company policies can be seen in *McDowell Times* articles such as "Flat Top Coal Field: Advantages Offered Laborers," and "Operators Know No Color Line."

[99] *West Virginia Coal Fields: Hearings*, 229-232, 339, 345.

[100] Sylvan Bank, Scott interviews; *McDowell Recorder*, September 2, 1921; Mrs. Samuel Solins and Mrs. Paul W. Jones, *McDowell County History* (Fort Worth, Tex.: University Supply, 1959), 68. UMWA President John L. Lewis stayed in the Jewish-owned Matz Hotel in Bluefield in 1920, according to a

report prepared by Baldwin Felts operative Tom Felts. Lewis and his associates investigated the possibility of renting office space in a commercial building owned by Louis Kaufman, a Jewish real estate developer, who offered them a yearly lease. Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983), 129.

[101] Berman interview transcript, 6, 11-16, 25, 28. On independent towns as "free spaces" where coal company power was limited, see Forester, *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties*, 8; "Sure We Got Problems," *Goldenseal* 20 (Summer 1994): 65. In an interview conducted in the early 1980s, Harry Berman talked about his family's relations with coal miners:

> We helped a lot of people there . . . people that needed things and they didn't have the money you know, these were union men. They worked in the mines. They worked hard. They worked them really like dogs at that time, see. Fifteen, sixteen hours a day, you know, and didn't pay 'em much. And they laid on their bellies and knees in water, see. You know, you feel sorry for people like that you know see, and my father he helped a lot of 'em out. He really did. He helped a lot of them out. I guess he lost a lot of money, but that's alright. But you make it back someway or another. (27)

[102] Eiland 1996, Weiner, Scott, Ira Sopher, Isadore Wein, Gorsetman interviews.

[103] *Williamson Daily News*, May 25,1920.

[104] Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*; Goldfield, "Blacks, Jews, and White Gentiles in the American South"; Alfred O. Hero Jr., "Southern Jews," in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 217-250. John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957), 128-130. Southern Jews in the pre-civil rights era were known for treating their black customers with more respect than African Americans generally received from whites.

[105] Mark Bauman, introductory essay to *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 7; Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 79; Evans, *The Provincials*, 6.

[106] *Middlesboro Daily News*, various issues, 1933 to 1937 (quotes, November 11 and 13, 1933).

[107] Sturm interview.

[108] Herman Weinstein was a leader in the drive for a commission form of government in Middlesboro (*Pineville Sun Courier*, October 23, 1914). The campaign was successful, but did not halt the corruption that seemed endemic to the town through the decades. In 1953 a civic group charged that "the commissioner form of government had led to widespread corruption" and it was voted out. "Middlesboro History" column, October 23, 1990.

Coalfield Jews' political views seem to have matched those of other southern Jews. Mark Bauman describes the political stance of Atlanta Jews as anti-prohibition, anti-union, pro-immigration, and as moderate on racial issues as southern norms would allow. "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: The German Jews from the Civil War through the Progressive Era," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 533-558.

[109] The seven mayors were: in Kentucky, Ginsburg, Sturm, and Abe Euster of Pineville; in West Virginia, Leo Schaffer of Glen Jean, Sam Rosen of Northfork, Aaron Catzen of Clark, Julian Budnick of Keystone.

On Jewish political involvement: *West Virginia Blue Book* (Charleston: Clerk of the Senate, 1916 to 1964); various issues, *McDowell Recorder*, *McDowell Times*, *Fayette Journal,* Middlesboro's *Pinnacle* and *Thousandsticks*; *Progressive West Virginians* (Wheeling: *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 1923); *West Virginians of 1934-1935* (Wheeling: *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 1935); Bell County Historical Society, *Bell County, Kentucky, History* (Paducah: Turner Publishing Co., 1994).

It is interesting to note that some of West Virginia's most prominent Jewish businessmen used their economic networks to support political candidates. In February 1900, Governor Dawson wrote to candidate (and future governor) A. B. White, "Isadore Schwabe is very active. He is the Jew clothier [from Charleston]. He is having his traveling men to work for you." A. B. White Papers (West Virginia and Regional History Collection).

[110] As usual, the *Recorder* paid much attention to the food served at the banquet, reporting in a front page story that every "viand and delicacy which the Jew considers fit for food was there in abundance" (July 5, 1912). See also *McDowell Recorder*, April 5, 1912; April 19, 1912; June 14, 1912; November 28, 1913; January 9, 1914.

[111] Jonathan D. Sarna, "Anti-Semitism in American History," *Commentary* 71, no. 3 (March 1981): 42-48 (quote, 44). While historians disagree on how much weight to give American anti-semitism, they universally acknowledge that, as Sarna puts it, "If the country has not been utter heaven for Jews, it has been as far from hell as Jews in the Diaspora have ever known" (47).

[112] Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 216, 223; Golden, *Jewish Roots in the Carolinas*, 6; Leonard Dinnerstein, "A Note on Southern Attitudes Toward Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 32 (1970): 43-49 (quote, 48).

Though southern anti-semitism took violent form in several populist attacks against Jewish businesses in the late nineteenth century and the Leo Frank lynching in the early twentieth, numerous factors led to a generally welcoming climate for Jews in the South: religiously-based philo-semitism, a need for the economic services of Jewish merchants, the overriding importance of the black-white divide, the sparseness of the Jewish population, their tendency to conform to southern norms, and the southern code of hospitality. See Stephen Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners: Counterpoint and Paradox," in *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry*, ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979) and Evans's *The Provincials*, 187-197. Howard Rabinowitz summarizes the debate over southern anti-semitism in his "Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South." He allows that there is much "conflicting evidence," but concludes that "with the possible exception of the use of violence, the South and southerners can justifiably claim to have exhibited less anti-Semitism and even nativism than certainly the East and Midwest" (446).

The West is missing from most discussions of regional anti-semitism, though some local studies suggest that anti-semitism there has been relatively insignificant. See Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*; Levinson, *Jews in the California Gold Rush*. Dinnerstein, however, again provides some evidence to the contrary with his discussion of the KKK in the West in *Antisemitism in America*, 98-99.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to situate coalfield Jewish communities within two contexts, Appalachian history and Jewish history, and to explore the linkages between the two. One linkage connects the Jews' historical economic role with the events taking place on the Central Appalachian plateau in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By re-establishing an economic niche that extended back to the old country, Jews contributed to the transformation of the region from a rural, subsistence-oriented society to a rural-industrial, consumer-oriented society—a role they had played in other places as well.

Another linkage concerns how social relations in the coalfields paralleled the Jewish experience elsewhere, from other Jewish communities in the American South to communities around the world. Interestingly, the closest parallels are not to relatively nearby Jewish populations (Johnstown, Pennsylvania, or the South) but rather to far-flung Jewish communities located where similar boomtown conditions prevailed.

As Bernard Reisman states, "It is at the margins of countless countries that Jews have interacted and benefited from the exchange with many different cultures." He was referring not only to opportunities for Jews to participate in the surrounding society, but also to how their interaction with others helped them to "clarify the ways in which they are different (distinctive) from non-Jews."[1] Both these aspects characterized the Jewish experience in the coalfields, where Jews actively engaged in their towns' social life and where Jewish identity was shaped not only by what they brought with them, but what they found in their new environment. In performing the "balancing act" between assimilation and maintenance of their cultural heritage, they developed a lively collective existence with communal structures that both focused on internal

matters and facilitated interaction with the surrounding society.

This is not to say that Jews in Appalachia were exactly like Jews elsewhere. Within the patterns that connect them to other times and places were infinite variations. Jewish communities exhibited considerable variety even within the coalfields, with some remaining Orthodox and others moving to Reform Judaism, most building synagogues but some managing without. One thing that might distinguish coalfield Jews from Jewish populations in other places is simply the sheer number of congregations they founded within a relatively small geographic area, especially considering the small size of their towns. In the early 1920s, the nine towns that hosted their congregations averaged less than four thousand inhabitants. In McDowell County, West Virginia, alone, three small congregations existed within fifteen miles of one another, serving some three hundred Jewish adults and children. The combined population of their three towns (Keystone, Kimball, and Welch) was less than seven thousand. These were truly small town Jews.

In many ways, Jews in the coalfields occupied a peripheral position in history: marginalized from the main body of American Jewry by their location in the heart of Central Appalachia; marginalized from their fellow residents by their religion and their non-participation in the coal industry; and, as inhabitants of a region that has been described as a "periphery" within America, marginalized from mainstream American society. But as many scholars have noted, there are things to be learned from people on the periphery. Although from a historical standpoint their position may have been unusual and their numbers small, they did not necessarily believe themselves to be marginal. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say that they fought against marginality by making a concerted effort to maintain their connections to Jews beyond the region and to participate in the society around them despite their minority status. Their success in doing both speaks not only to their own position, but also contradicts stereotypes that stubbornly cling

to the Appalachian region: a place typically thought of as "isolated," "homogeneous," and "inward" was none of those things—at least, not in the coalfields.

Thomas Bender defines community as "a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds." Using this definition, coalfield Jews belonged to at least three communities: their own local Jewish group, the town in which they lived, and a larger Jewish collectivity that involved friends, relatives, and business relationships in Baltimore, New York, and other places beyond the region. These communities were not enclaves separated from each other or the world around them, but rather were engaged in a dynamic process of interaction. Local Jewish communities reacted and adapted to their surroundings. Their larger Jewish networks, meanwhile, contributed to the consumer culture of coalfield towns—thus bearing out Bender's observation that "community" and "modernity" are not polar opposites, but rather two different forms of human relationships that interact and influence each other.[2]

In their contribution to the modernization of the region, Jews can be seen as allies of the chief modernizer: the coal industry. In fact, the coalfield middle class has often been described as a sort of "junior partner" to the coal industry (in a very unequal partnership, needless to say). This role too has echoes with Jewish life in other places, extending back to centuries in East Europe, where Jews acted as agents of the ruling class. The comparison cannot be carried too far, since coalfield Jews were not the representatives of coal companies or absentee land corporations and were never blamed for economic breakdowns, as they were in Eastern Europe. But in both cases the alliance could be described as uneasy, as well as unequal. Like everyone else, Jews were dependent on the coal industry for their economic survival. But, contrary to usual depictions of the coalfield middle class, they were not always fervent boosters of the industry and they recognized the inequalities that existed within it. They preferred to remain neutral in the class

conflicts that wracked the region, though when forced to choose sides, they sided with the established order. How representative they were of the middle class as a whole remains an open question. Because so few Jews were directly involved in the coal industry, they might have taken a more balanced view of it than others. On the other hand, most merchants, Jewish and non-Jewish, depended for their livelihood on the patronage of the region's large working class and this might have mitigated the general enthusiasm for the side of "law and order."

If not always fervent boosters of the coal industry, Jews were certainly avid boosters of their towns. As resident, as opposed to absentee, property owners, their investments tended to remain in the community. As participants in civic life, they supported parks, libraries, schools, and hospitals. Remnants of their contributions still exist in the region, although they are few and far between. Ultimately, the coalfields' small middle class—and the even smaller segment made up of Jews—could play only a minor role in the course of regional development. With the restructuring of the coal industry in the 1950s, the region's economic decline was swift. Jewish communities, who were at the same time affected by other factors such as national retail trends, saw their young people move away from the region, and many older people decided to spend their retirement years elsewhere. And so Jewish life in most of the towns disappeared.

Today coalfield residents live in quite a different world than the one that existed at the height of the coal boom. Though plenty of coal is still mined, very few people are needed to mine it. Job growth, as elsewhere in America, is found mainly in the service sector. Reminders of the past are everywhere; abandoned company stores dot the region and downtown business districts feature rows of empty stores. Old slate dumps have become sites for suburban-style shopping developments. The innumerable products of American consumer culture can still be purchased,

but now they are to be found at the Wal-Marts and strip malls on the edges of coalfield towns. Sewell, West Virginia, the first commercial center of the coalfields and home of the first Jewish settler, now exists only in the heritage tourism literature of the National Park Service, which owns the land along New River where the town used to be. McDowell County, at the turn of the twentieth century the region's fastest growing place and home to the largest Jewish population, entered the twenty-first as one of the most economically distressed sites in the nation, its population having shrunk to pre-1910 figures.[3]

Beckley has become southern West Virginia's growth center, and its small but tenacious Jewish community has survived thanks to the resolve of a few older families and the influx of a few new ones. The late Isadore Wein, local pharmacist and lay rabbi, saw the congregation through its leanest years before a small growth spurt occurred in the 1990s. His determination to keep Temple Beth El going reflected not only a desire for Jewish continuity, but a realization that the Jewish experience in the coalfields was something of significance. "This temple must never disappear from Beckley," he told an interviewer. "Because we need a temple to say—Jews lived here at one time."

Notes to Conclusion

[1] Bernard Reisman, "Alaskan Jews Discover the Last Frontier," in Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 111-126 (quote, 125).

[2] Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 7.

[3] U.S. Census Bureau. *Census of Population*, 1910, 1990.

Sources

Archives and Collections

American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati:
- Abraham I. Shinedling Collection.
- Biographies File:
  - David Kasdan. "The History and Memoirs of My Life."
  - "Memoir of Bernard Silverman," by Abraham Shinedling.
  - Sidney L. Regner. "Experiences While Officiating as a Student at the High Holidays."
- B'nai El Congregation, Logan, W.Va. Records.
- B'nai Israel Congregation, Williamson, W.Va. Records.
- B'nai Sholom Congregation, Harlan, Ky. Records.
- Congregation Emanuel, Welch, W.Va. Records.
- Hebrew Union College Collection. Series B, Faculty and Student Affairs.
- Small Collections:
  - Bluefield Congregation Ahavath Sholom Fact Sheet.
  - "Jewish Cemetery, Middlesboro, Kentucky." Middlesboro, Ky., Folder.
  - "Jewish Heritage of the Winchester [Va.] Community." Winchester, Va., Folder.

David Weinstein Collection. Possession of the Weinstein Family.

Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore:
- Baltimore Bargain House catalogues. 1900, 1906, 1920.

West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown:
- A. B. White Papers.
- J. G. Bradley, "The Coal Operator and the Miner—A Partnership."
- Justus Collins Papers.
- Roy H. Keadle Scrapbook.
- S. D. Stokes Papers.
- Walter G. Glasscock Papers.
- Walter R. Thurmond. "The Town of Thurmond, 1884-1961." Unpublished paper.

Interviews

Albert, Charlie. Interview with Maryanne Reed. Williamson, W. Va., 8 August 1995.

Albert, Martha and Ivan. Interview with author. Williamson, W. Va., 8 November 1996.

Appleman, Zelda Totz. Phone interview with author. 1999.

Baloff, Esther Sturm. Interview with Barbara Winick Bernstein and Marilyn Jacob Shore. 20 May 1985. Knoxville Jewish Community Archives Project, Knoxville Jewish Federation, Knoxville, Tenn.

Bank, Gail. Phone interview with author. 28 September and 4 October 1998.

Bank, Kenneth. Interview with author. Baltimore, 6 November 1998.

Bank, Sylvan and Elaine. Phone interview with author. 4 March 1998.

Bennett, Wallace. Interview with Paul Niden. Oak Hill, W. Va., 1 October 1980. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Va.

Berman, Harry. Interview with John C. Hennen Jr. Williamson, W. Va., 15 and 28 June 1989. Matewan Oral History Project, Matewan Development Center, Matewan, W. Va.

Brant, Nancy. Phone interview with author. October 1998.
Cohen, Bertie Rodgin. Interview with author. Charleston, W. Va., 6 March 2000.
Drosick, Edna Moore. Interview with author. Pocahontas, Va., 26 April 1998.
Eiland, Edward. Interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Logan, W. Va., 28 May 1996.
_____. Interview with author. Logan, W. Va., 19 May 1998.
Fink, Sidney. Interview with author. Beckley, W. Va., 12 October 1996.
Goodman, Temple. Phone interview with author. 21 February 1999.
Gorsetman, Isadore. Interview with author. Charleston, W. Va., 13 May 1998.
Gottlieb, Bernard. Interview with author. Clarksburg, W. Va., 5 November 1996.
Gottlieb, Betty Schuchat. Interview with author. Parkersburg, W. Va., 18 December 1997.
Hecker, Reva Totz. Interview with author. Baltimore, 5 November 1998.
Jaffe, Goldie Scott. Phone interview with author. 30 April 2000.
Katzen, Emanuel. Interview with author and Maryanne Reed. Princeton, W. Va., 30 May 1996.
Koslow, Milton. Interview with author. Charleston, W. Va., 13 May 1998.
Mankoff, Lou. Interview with author and Maryanne Reed. Williamson, W. Va., March 1996.
McGuire, Christine Carr. Phone interview with author. November 1998.
Monk, Herman. Interview with Paul Niden. Beckley, W. Va. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Va.
Monroe, Harry and Frances. Interview with author. Bluefield, W. Va., 27 April 1998.
Ofsa, Mary Marsh. Phone interview with author. 26 March 1999.
Phipps, E. H. Interview with Paul Niden. Beckley, W. Va., 16 August 1980. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Va.
Pickus, Manuel. Interview with author. Charleston, W. Va., 18 May 1998.
_____. Interview with Maryanne Reed. Charleston, W. Va., 8 August, 1996. Transcript in author's possession.
Rakes, Billie. Interview with author. Oak Hill, W. Va., 12 October 1996.
Rosen, Betty Ofsa. Interview with author and Maryanne Reed. Williamson, W. Va., 28 May 1996.
Scott, Isadore. Phone interview with author. 14 December, 1997.
Sopher, Ira and Mary Jo. Interview with author. Beckley, W. Va., 13 October 1996.
Sopher, Ira. Interview with author and Maryanne Reed, Beckley, W. Va., 31 May 1996.
Sturm, Melvin. Phone interview with author. 4 October 1998.
Tams, William. Interview with Richard M. Hadsell. Tams, W. Va., 9 June 1966. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Va.
Wein, Isadore, and Jean Abrams Wein. Interview with author. Beckley, W. Va., 13 October 1996.
Weiner, Sam and Harvey. Interview with author. Logan, W. Va., 8 November 1996.
Weinstein, David. Interview with Ann Matheny. Middlesboro, Ky., 26 July 1990. Transcript available at Middlesboro Public Library.

Directories

Beckley City Directory. Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1932, 1940.
Bluefield City Directory. Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1910, 1915, 1919.
Kitts' City and Coalfield Directory. Bluefield, W.Va.: City Directory Co., 1904.
Logan City Directory 1927. N.P.
West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1882-1883. Detroit: R. L. Polk & Company.
West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1895-1914. Pittsburgh: R. L. Polk & Co.
Williamson City Directory 1952. Chillicothe, Ohio: Mullin-Kille Co. and *Williamson Daily News*, 1952.

Newspapers

Bell County Republican. Pineville, Ky. 1902.
Bluefield Daily Telegraph. Bluefield, W. Va. 1901 to 1924.
Fayette Journal. Fayetteville, W. Va. 1900 to 1906.
Harlan County Courier. Harlan, Ky. 1931.
Harlan Enterprise. Harlan, Ky. 1931 to 1933.
McDowell Recorder. Welch, W. Va. 1911 to 1922.
McDowell Times. Keystone, W. Va. 1913 to 1918.
Middlesboro Daily News. Middlesboro, Ky. 1930 to 1937.
"Middlesboro History" column. *Middlesboro Daily News*. Middlesboro, Ky. 1990 to 1991.
Middlesboro News. Middlesboro, Ky. 1903 to 1905.
Middlesborough News. Middlesboro, Ky. 1899 to 1903. (Spelling changed to *Middlesboro News*, 1903)
Mingo Republican. Williamson, W. Va. 1911 to 1926.
Pineville Sun-Courier. Pineville, Ky. 1912 to 1914.
Pinnacle. Middlesboro, Ky. 1915 to 1917.
Raleigh Register. Beckley, W. Va. 1908.
Thousandsticks. Middlesboro, Ky. 1911 to 1913.
Welch Daily News. Welch, W. Va. 1920, 1933.
Williamson Daily News. Williamson, W. Va. 1920.

Public Records

Acts of the West Virginia Legislature. 1925, 1927, 1975.
Fayette County Courthouse, Fayetteville, W. Va.
Circuit Court Records, Criminal Court Records, Deed Books, Order Books, Declaration of Intention Books, Petition for Naturalization Books.
Kentucky Department of Mines Annual Reports. Frankfort: Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1924-1926.
Logan County Courthouse, Logan, W. Va.
Deed Books, Will Books, Declaration of Intention Books, Petition for Naturalization Books,
McDowell County Courthouse, Welch, W. Va.
Circuit Court Records, Criminal Court Records, Deed Books, Incorporation Books, Will Books, Declaration of Intention Books, Petition for Naturalization Books.
Mingo County Courthouse, Williamson, W. Va.
Circuit Court Records, Deed Books, Incorporation Books, Will Books, Power of Attorney Books, Declaration of Intention Books, Petition for Naturalization Books.
Raleigh County Courthouse, Beckley, W. Va.
Deed Books, Will Books, Declaration of Intention Books, Petition for Naturalization Books.
Tazewell County Deed Indexes, Deed Books, Will Books. Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.
U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population*. Washington: GPO. 1880-1990.
_____. *Census of Religious Bodies*, 1936. Washington: GPO.
_____. Manuscript Census Schedules.
Bell and Harlan Counties, Ky.: 1900, 1910, 1920.
Fayette County, W. Va.: 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920.
Kanawha and Mercer Counties, W. Va.: 1900.
Logan, McDowell, and Mingo Counties, Va.: 1900, 1910, 1920.
Tazewell and Wise Counties, Va.: 1900, 1910, 1920.
_____. *State Compendium: West Virginia*. Washington: GPO, 1925.
U.S. Coal Commission. *Report of the United States Coal Commission.* Washington: GPO, 1925.

U.S. Immigration Commission. *Emigration Conditions in Europe, Reports of the Immigration Commission, Volume 12.* Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911.
_____. *Immigrants in Industries, Vol. 7*. Senate docs. 633, 61st Congress, 2nd Session. Washington: GPO, 1911.
West Virginia Blue Book (*West Virginia Legislative Handbook and Manual and Official Register*). 1916-1964. Charleston: Clerk of the Senate.
West Virginia Coal Fields: Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, 67th Congress, First Session. Washington: GPO, 1921.
West Virginia Code. 1891, 1923, 1927, 1973.
West Virginia Department of Mines Annual Reports. Charleston: West Virginia Department of Mines, 1906 to 1930.
West Virginia Supreme Court Reports. Various volumes.

Books and Articles

Abramovitch, Hirsh. "Rural Jewish Occupations in Lithuania." *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* (1947-1948): 205-221.
Ain, Abraham. "Swislocz: Portrait of a Jewish Community in Eastern Europe." In *East European Jews in Two Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Annual,* ed. Deborah Dash Moore, 22-50. Evanston, Ill.: YIVO and Northwestern University Press, 1990.
Aleichem, Sholom. *Old Country Tales.* New York: Paperback Library Edition, 1969.
Alexander, Irving. "Wilcoe: The People of a Coal Town," and "Jewish Merchants in the Coalfields." *Goldenseal* 16 (Spring 1990): 28-35.
American Jewish Year Book. 1910, 1916, 1918, 1940.
Anonymous ("A Virginia Lad"). *Sodom and Gomorrah of To-day, or, the History of Keystone, West Virginia.* N.p.: 1912. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W. Va.
Antin, Mary. *The Promised Land*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912.
"Ashes, Memories Have Settled on Keystone's Cinder Bottom." *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 26, 1975.
Ashkenazi, Elliott. *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988.
Atherton, Lewis E. *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America*. Revised edition. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971.
_____. "Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-bellum South." *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19, no. 1 (February 1945): 35-59.
Ayers, Edward L. *The Promise of the New South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
Bailey, Ken. "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917." *West Virginia History* 34 (January 1973): 141-161.
Baltrop, Paul R. "Early Colonial Australia, Jews, and Aborigines." In *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, 91-109. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
Banker, Mark. "Unraveling the Multicultural Riddle: Clues from Southern Appalachia and Hispanic New Mexico." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 277-299.
Barkai, Avraham. *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1994.
Baron, Salo W. *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1976.
Barr, Terry. "A Shtetl Grew in Bessemer: Temple Beth-El and Jewish Life in Small Town Alabama." *Southern Jewish History* 3 (2000): 1-44.

Barron, Hal S. *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
Battlo, Jean. "Cinder Bottom: A Coalfields Red-Light District." *Goldenseal* 20 (Summer 1994): 60-65.
Baum, Charlotte, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel. *The Jewish Woman in America*. New York: Dial Press, 1976.
Bauman, Mark K. "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: The German Jews from the Civil War through the Progressive Era." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82 (Fall 1998): 533-558.
_____. "Introduction." In *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).
Bauman, Mark K., and Bobbie Malone, "Introduction: Directions in Southern Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (September 1997): 192;
Becker, Martha Jane Williams. *Bramwell: Diary of a Millionaire Town*. Chapmanville, W.Va., 1988.
Bell County Historical Society. *Bell County, Kentucky, History*. Paducah: Turner Publishing Co., 1994.
Beller, Steven. "'Pride and Prejudice' or 'Sense and Sensibility?' How Reasonable Was Anti-Semitism in Vienna, 1880-1939." In *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, 99-123. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
Bender, Thomas. *Community and Social Change in America*. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978.
Berk, Stephen M. *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope: Russian Jewry and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985.
Berry, Chad. "Upon What Will I Hang My Hat in the Future? Appalachia and Awaiting Post-Postmodernity." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 6 (2000): 121-130.
Besmann, Wendy. *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001.
Billings, Dwight B., and Kathleen M. Blee. "Agriculture and Poverty in the Kentucky Mountains: Beech Creek, 1850-1910." In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 233-269. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
_____. *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
Billings, Dwight B., Mary Beth Pudup, and Altina Waller. "Taking Exception with Exceptionalism: The Emergence and Transformation of Historical Studies of Appalachia." In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 1-24. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
"Black Migration to Southern West Virginia, 1870-1930." *Goldenseal* 5, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1979): 30-31.
Blanton, Sherry. "Lives of Quiet Affirmation: The Jewish Women of Early Anniston, Alabama." *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 25-53.
Bodnar, John. *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977.
_____. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
Bonacich, Edna. "A Theory of Middleman Minorities." *American Sociological Review* 38 (October, 1973): 583-594.
Bragg, Melody. *Thurmond: Dodge City of the East*. NP.
Braudel Fernand. *The Wheels of Commerce*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
Byrne, George, ed., *Handbook of West Virginia, 1915.* Charleston: Lovett Printing Company, 1915.
Cantrell, Doug. "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County, 1910-1930." *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 86, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 119-141.
Centennial Review and Souvenir Program of Mercer County. Bluefield, W.Va.: Mercer County Centennial Association, 1937.

"Charles Midleburg." *Progressive West Virginians*. 1923.
Chirot, Daniel. "Conflicting Identities and the Dangers of Communalism." In Chirot and Reid, *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, 3-32. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
Chirot, Daniel, and Anthony Reid, eds. *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
Clark, Thomas D. *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944.
_____. "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South." In *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973.
Cohen, Chester. *Shtetl Finder Gazetteer: Jewish Communities in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1989.
Cohen, Edward. *The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999.
Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
"Company and Other Stores." *Coal Age* 8 (October 1915): 716.
Corbin, David Alan. *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.
Cowan, Neil M., and Ruth Schwartz Cowan. *Our Parents' Lives: The Americanization of Eastern European Jews.* New York: Basic Books, 1989.
DeRosett, Lou, and Joe Marcum. *Middlesboro at One Hundred, 1890-1990*. Middlesboro: Middlesboro Centennial Commission, 1990.
Dietz, Elizabeth Jane. "As We Lived A Long Time Ago." *Goldenseal* (Fall 1981): 16.
Diner, Hasia. *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*. Volume 2 of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. Henry L. Feingold. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
Dinnerstein, Leonard. "A Note on Southern Attitudes Toward Jews." *Jewish Social Studies* 32 (1970): 43-49.
_____. *Antisemitism in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
_____. *The Leo Frank Case*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
Dinnerstein, Leonard, and Mary Dale Palsson, eds. *Jews in the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973.
"Discussion by Readers." *Coal Age* 8 (November 1915): 895.
Dollard, John. *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957.
Dubrovsky, Gertrude. "Book Review: *Jewish Farmers in the Catskills*, by Abraham D. Lavender and Clarence B. Steinberg." *American Jewish Archives* 48, no. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1996): 97-102.
Dunaway, Wilma. *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
Eiland, Rudy. "The Retail Merchant." In *Centennial Program, City of Logan, West Virginia, 1852-1952* (Logan, W. Va.: Logan Centennial Association, 1952).
Eisenberg, Ellen. "Argentine and American Jewry: A Case for Contrasting Immigrant Origins." *American Jewish Archives* 47 (Spring-Summer, 1995): 1-16.
Eller, Ronald D. *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.
Elovitz, Mark H. *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974.
Encyclopaedia Judaica. New York: MacMillan Company, 1971.
Evans, Eli. *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South*. Revised Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
Ewen, Stuart, and Elizabeth Ewen. *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. Second edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Faragher, John Mack. *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
Farley, Yvonne Snyder. "To Keep Their Faith Strong: The Raleigh Orthodox Community," and "One of the Faithful: Asaff Rahall, Church Founder." *Goldenseal* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 43-53.
Feingold, Henry L. *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945*. Volume 4 of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. Henry L. Feingold. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
Ferris, Marcie Cohen. "From the Recipe File of Luba Cohen: A Study of Southern Jewish Foodways and Cultural Identity." *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 129-164.
Fishback, Price. "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s." *Journal of Economic History* 46, no. 4 (December 1986): 1011-1029.
Fishman, Priscilla, ed. *The Jews of the United States*. New York: New York Times Book Co., 1973.
Flood, A. P. "Welch, The City of Friendship." *West Virginia Review* 1 (June 1924): 16-21.
Forester, William D. *Before We Forget: Harlan County, 1920 through 1930*. N.P.: 1983.
_____. *Harlan County—The Turbulent Thirties*. N.P.: 1986.
Frankel, Jonathan. *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
Friedenberg, Albert M. "The Jews and the American Sunday Laws." *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 11 (1903): 101-115.
Friedman, Lee. *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots*. New York: MacMillan Co., 1943.
Gartner, Lloyd. "Jewish Migrants en Route from Europe to North America: Traditions and Realities." In *The Jews of North America*, ed. Moses Rischin, 25-43. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987.
Gaventa, John. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.
Gerber, David A., ed. *Anti-Semitism in American History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
_____. "Introduction." In *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber, 3-54. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
_____. "Cutting Out Shylock: Elite Anti-Semitism and the Quest for Moral Order in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Marketplace." *Journal of American History* 69 (December 1982): 615-637.
Gilman, Sander L. "The Jewish Nose: Are the Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job." In *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. L. J. Silberstein and R. L. Cohen, 364-401. New York: New York University Press, 1994.
_____. *The Jew's Body*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Gilman, Sander L., and Milton Shain, eds., *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
Gleason, Arthur. "Company-Owned Americans." *The Nation* (1920).
Golab, Caroline. *Immigrant Destinations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977.
Golden, Harry. *Jewish Roots in the Carolinas: A Pattern of American Philo-Semitism.* Greensboro, N. C.: *Carolina Israelite*, 1955.
_____. *Our Southern Landsman.* NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974.
Goldfield, David. "Blacks, Jews, and White Gentiles in the American South." *Southern Cultures* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 58-79.
Goren, Arthur A. "Traditional Institutions Transplanted." In *The Jews of North America*, ed. Moses Rischin, 62-78. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987.
Greene, Janet W. "Strategies for Survival: Women's Work in the Southern West Virginia Coal Camps." *West Virginia History* 49 (1990): 37-54.
Gross, Nachum, ed. *Economic History of the Jews*. New York: Schocken, 1975.
Gurock, Jeffrey. "The Orthodox Synagogue." In *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, 37-84. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
Hagen, William W. *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
Hahn, Steven. *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890.* New York: Oxford University Press), 1983.

Hahn, Steven, and Jonathan Prude, eds. *The Countryside in an Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951.
Hatcher, Thomas C., and Geneva Steele, eds. *The Heritage of McDowell County, West Virginia, 1858-1995*. War, W. Va.: McDowell County Historical Society, 1995.
Heinze, Andrew. "Jewish Street Merchants and Mass Consumption in New York City, 1880-1914." *American Jewish Archives* 41 (1989): 199-214.
Hennen, John C. *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
Hero, Alfred O. Jr. "Southern Jews." In *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, 217-250. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973.
Herr, Kincaid. *The Louisville & Nashville Railroad*. Louisville: L&N Railroad, 1964.
Hertz, Aleksander. *The Jews in Polish Culture*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
Hertz, Rabbi J. H. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*. London: Soncino Press, 1981.
Hertzberg, Steven. "Southern Jews and Their Encounter with Blacks: Atlanta, 1850-1915." *Atlanta Historical Society Journal* (Fall 1979): 7-24.
_____. *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978.
Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "The Eastern European Era in Jewish History." In *East European Jews in Two Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Manual*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore, 1-21. Evanston, Ill.: YIVO and Northwestern University Press, 1990.
Hevener, John W. *Which Side Are You On? The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-1939*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978.
Hickam, Homer. *October Sky*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1999.
Higham, John. *Send These To Me: Immigrants in Urban America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
_____. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955.
Howe, Irving. *World of Our Fathers*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1976.
Hundert, Gershon David. "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland." In *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from* Polin, ed. Antony Polonsky, 20-23. Washington, D.C.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993.
Hunter, Houston Kermit. "The Story of McDowell County." *West Virginia Review* 17, no. 7 (April 1940): 165-169.
Hyman, Paula E. *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.
"Idle Coal Miners Face Present with Despair in West Virginia." *New York Times*. 27 January, 1961.
"I. L. Shor: His Life As He Told It." *Every Friday* (Cincinnati, Ohio). 23 September, 1949.
"Irvin Gergely." Obituary. *Lexington Herald-Leader*. Lexington, Ky. May 27, 2000.
Jaffee, David. "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860." *Journal of American History* (September 1991): 511-535.
"Jewish Communities of the United States. *American Jewish Year Book, 1940.*
"Jews in America." *Fortune* (February 1936).
Jick, Leon A. *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870*. Hanover, N. H.: Brandeis University Press.
Johnpoll, Bernard K. "Why They Left: Russian-Jewish Mass Migration and the Repressive Laws, 1881-1917." *American Jewish Archives* 47 (Spring-Summer 1995): 17-54.
Jones, Jack M. *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia*. Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983.
Jones, Loyal. "Mountain Religion: An Overview." In *Christianity in Appalachia*, ed. Bill J. Leonard, 91-102. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999.

Jones, Lu Ann. "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce in the Rural New South." *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 2 (May 2000): 297-320.
Joselit, Jenna Weissman. "'Merry Chanuka': The Changing Holiday Practices of American Jews, 1880-1950." In *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
_____. "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: The Synagogue Sisterhood, 1890-1940." In *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, 206-230. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
Kaplan, Benjamin. *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community*. New York: Bookman, 1957.
Kassow, Samuel. "Communal and Social Change in the Polish Shtetl." In *Jewish Settlement and Community in the Modern Western World*, ed. R. Dotterer, D. Dash Moore, S.M. Cohen, 56-92. Selinsgrove, Penn.: Susquehanna University Press, 1991.
Katz, Jacob. *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.
Kessner, Thomas. *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Kieval, Hillel. "Middleman Minorities and Blood." In *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, 208-233. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "The Folk Culture of Jewish Immigrant Communities." In *The Jews of North America*, ed. Moses Rischin, 79-84. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987.
Kiser, Virginia Strange. *Memories of Pocahontas*. Bluefield, W. Va.: H. E. Kiser Jr., 1998.
Kleeblatt, Norman L., ed. *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
Klier, John Doyle. *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772-1825*. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986.
Klier, John D., and Shlomo Lambroza, eds. *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
Kligsberg, Moses. "Jewish Immigrants in Business: A Sociological Study." *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 56 (March 1967): 283-318.
Kline, Michael. "Every Tree, Every Bush, Every Rock: An Interview with Hyman Weiner, Charleston Tailor." *Goldenseal* 4 (April-September 1978): 31-38.
Kneeland, Frank. "Patriotic Demonstration at Gary, W. Va." *Coal Age* 11, no. 19 (1917): 826.
Kulikoff, Allan. "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America." *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (January 1989): 120-144.
Kuznets, Simon. "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure." In *Perspectives in American History* 9, ed. D. Fleming and B. Bailyn, 35-124. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
Lamar, Howard. "From Bondage to Contract: Ethnic Labor in the American West, 1600-1890." In *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
Lambie, Joseph T. *From Mine to Market*. New York: New York University Press, 1954.
Lane, Ron, and Ted Schempf. *Sewell: A New River Community*. Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1985.
Lane, Winthrop D. *Civil War in West Virginia: A Story of Industrial Conflict in the Coal Mines*. New York: Arno Press, 1921.
Lavender, Abraham D., ed. *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977.

Lears, Jackson. "Beyond Veblen: Rethinking Consumer Culture in America." In *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
Lee, Howard B. *Bloodletting in Appalachia*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1969.
Leonard, Bill J. ed. *Christianity in Appalachia*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999.
Levine, Hillel. *Economic Origins of Anti-Semitism: Poland and its Jews in the Early Modern Period.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
Levinson, Robert E. *The Jews in the California Gold Rush*. New York: Ktav, 1978.
Levitats, Isaac. *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917*. Jerusalem: Posner & Sons, 1981.
Levy, Lester S. *Jacob Epstein*. Baltimore: Maran Press, 1978.
Lewis, Ronald L. "Appalachian Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Coal, Culture, and Social Change in West Virginia." *Urban Studies* 30, no. 2 (1993): 299-308.
_____. *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987.
_____. *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
Light, Ivan H. *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare Among Chinese, Japanese, and Blacks*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.
Livingston, John. Introduction to *Jews of the American West*, ed. Moses Rischin and John Livingston, 15-25. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
Loeb, Lori Anne. *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
"Logan—A Big Little City." *West Virginia Review* (November 1924): 52-59.
"Logan—A Big Little City." *West Virginia Review* 5 (November 1927): 73.
Logan Centennial Association. *Centennial Program, City of Logan, West Virginia, 1852-1952*. Logan, W.Va.: Logan Centennial Association, 1952.
Lowi, Theodore. "Southern Jews: The Two Communities." In *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, 265-282. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973.
Macmillan, Hugh, and Frank Shapiro. *Zion in Africa: The Jews of Zambia*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999.
Maggard, Sally. "From Farmers to Miners: The Decline of Agriculture in Eastern Kentucky." In *Science and Agricultural Development*, ed. Lawrence Busch, 25-66. Totowa, N. J.: Allenheld, Osmun, and Co., 1981.
Mahler, Raphael. "The Economic Background of Jewish Emigration from Galicia to the United States." In *East European Jews in Two Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Annual,* ed. Deborah Dash Moore, 125-137. Evanston, Ill.: YIVO and Northwestern University Press, 1990.
Malkin, Carole, ed. *The Journeys of David Toback As Retold by His Granddaughter*. New York: Schocken, 1988.
Mann, Ralph. "Mountain Settlement: Appalachian and National Modes of Migration." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 2 (Fall 1996): 337-345.
Marcus, Jacob Rader. *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History*. New York: Ktav, 1981.
_____. *United States Jewry, 1776-1985, Volume 2*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1991.
Marino, Rose. *Welch and Its People*. Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Press, 1985.
Mathews, Garret. "Ashes, Memories Have Settled on Keystone's Cinder Bottom." *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 26, 1975.
McCauley, Deborah Vansau. *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
McClean, Nancy. "The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism." *Journal of American History* 78 (December 1991): 917-948.
McCormick, Kyle. "McDowell County Celebrates its Centennial." *West Virginia History* 19 (April, 1958): 202-208.

McCoy, Clyde B., and James S. Brown. "Appalachian Migration to Midwestern Cities." In *The Invisible Minority: Urban Appalachians*, ed. William W. Philliber and Clyde B. McCoy, 35-78. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981.

McDaniels, Jennifer. "Totz Experienced Boom, Bust Often Characterized by Coal Industry." Harlan County Heritage 13. *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, March 31, 1998.

McGehee, Stuart. "Gary: A First-Class Operation." *Goldenseal* (Fall 1988): 28-32.

Mendelsohn, Ezra. *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Meyer, Simon. *One Hundred Years: An Anthology of Charleston Jewry*. Charleston, W. Va.: Jones Printing Co., 1972.

Meyers, Allan D. "Ethnic Distinctions and Wealth among Colonial Jamaican Merchants, 1685-1716." *Social Science History* 22 (Spring 1998): 47-81.

Mitchell, Robert, ed. *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, & Development in the Preindustrial Era*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991.

Morawska, Ewa. *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Mostov, Stephen G. "Dun and Bradstreet Reports as a Source of Jewish Economic History: Cincinnati, 1840-1875." *American Jewish History* 72, no. 3 (1983).

Nadell, Pamela S. "The Journey to America by Steam: The Jews of Eastern Europe in Transition." *American Jewish History* 71 (1981-1982): 269-284.

Neu, Irene D. "The Jewish Businesswoman in America." *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1976): 137-154.

"No Slowing Down for Veteran Businessman." *Williamson Daily News*. July 30, 1993, p. 17a.

Noe, Kenneth W. *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

Nugent, Walter. *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Obermiller, Phillip J., and William W. Philliber, eds. *Appalachia in an International Context: Cross-National Comparisons of Developing Regions*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994.

Olson, James S. "The Depths of the Great Depression: Economic Collapse in West Virginia, 1932-1933." *West Virginia History* 38 (April 1977).

Peiss, Kathy Lee. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Pendleton, William C. *History of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia, 1748-1920*. W.C. Hill Printing Company, 1920.

Perlmann, Joel. "Beyond New York: The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I. and Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-1915." *American Jewish History* 72 (March 1983): 369-394.

Pomeroy, Earl. "On Becoming a Westerner." In *Jews of the American West*, ed. Moses Rischin and John Livingston, 194-212. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.

Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1991.

Progressive West Virginians. Wheeling: *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 1923.

Pudup, Mary Beth. "Social Class and Economic Development in Southeast Kentucky, 1820-1880." In *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, & Development in the Preindustrial Era*, ed. Robert Mitchell, 235-260. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991

_____. "The Boundaries of Class in Preindustrial Appalachia." *Journal of Historical Geography* 15, no. 2 (1989): 139-162.

_____. "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 270-296. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Pudup, Mary Beth, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, eds. *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
_____. "Taking Exception with Exceptionalism: The Emergence and Transformation of Historical Studies of Appalachia." In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 1-24. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
Rabinowitz, Howard N. "Nativism, Bigotry and Anti-Semitism in the South." *American Jewish History* 77 (March 1988): 437-451.
_____. "Writing Jewish Community History," *American Jewish History*: 119-127.
Raeff, Marc. *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
Rand-McNally Indexed Atlas of the World, Volume 2: Foreign Countries. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1905.
Raphael, Marc. "Beyond New York." In *Jews of the American West*, ed. Moses Rischin and John Livingston, 52-65. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
Reed, John Shelton. "Shalom, Y'All: Jewish Southerners." In *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
Reid, Anthony. "Entrepreneurial Minorities, Nationalism, and the State." In *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, ed. Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, 33-71. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.
Reisman, Bernard. "Alaskan Jews Discover the Last Frontier." In *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, 111-126. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
Rice, Otis K. *The Allegheny Frontier: West Virginia Beginnings*, 1730-1830. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973.
Rischin, Moses, and John Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
Roberts, Peter. *Anthracite Coal Communities: A Study of the Demography, the Social, Educational and Moral Life of the Anthracite Regions*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1904.
Rockaway, Robert. *But—He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters*. New York, 1995.
Roden, B. F. "The Commissary: Its Indispensability." *Coal Age* 4 (1913): 240-241.
Rogger, Hans. *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
Rogoff, Leonard. "Divided Together: Jews and African Americans in Durham, North Carolina." In *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, 190-212. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997.
_____. *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001.
_____. "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew." *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (September, 1997): 195-262.
_____. "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina." *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81.
Rosenheim, W.S. "Williamson: In the Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field." *West Virginia Review* 2 (October 1924), 20-22.
Rosten, Leo. *The Joys of Yiddish*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.
Rothenberg, Joshua. "Demythologizing the Shtetl." *Midstream* (March 1981): 25-30.
Rothman, Hal. "'Same Horse, New Wagon': Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865-1930." *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83-104.
Routes and Resorts of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. Richmond: Chesapeake & Ohio Railway, 1878.

Rubinow, I. M. "Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia." *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* 72 (September, 1907): 487-583.
Sacks, Karen Brodkin. "How Did the Jews Become White Folks?" In *Race*, ed. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, 78-102. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
Salstrom, Paul. "Newer Appalachia as One of America's Last Frontiers." In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 76-102. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
Sarna, Jonathan D. "Anti-Semitism in American History." *Commentary* 71, no. 3 (March 1981): 42-48.
_____. "The 'Mythical Jew' and the 'Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth Century America." In *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
_____. "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914." *American Jewish History* 71 (March 1981): 259-269.
Schlereth, Thomas J. "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America." In *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
Schmier, Louis. "For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do Enough: A Jewish Peddler and His Black Customers Look at Each Other." *American Jewish History* 73 (1983): 39-55.
_____. "Hellooo! Peddlerman! Hellooo!" In *Ethnic Minorities in Gulf Coast Society*, ed. Jerrell H. Shofner and Linda V. Ellsworth. Pensacola: 1979.
_____. "Jews and Gentiles in a South Georgia Town." In *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society*, ed. Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press.
_____. "'We Were All Part of a Lost Generation': Jewish Religious Life in a Rural Southern Town, 1900-1940." In *Cultural Perspectives on the American South, Vol. 5,* ed. C.R. Wilson. New York: Gordon & Breach, 1991.
Schoenburg, Nancy, and Stuart Schoenburg. *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991.
Schultz, Joseph P. "The 'Ze'enah U'Re'enah': Torah for the Folk." *Judaism* 36 (Winter, 1987): 84-96.
Schuricht, Herrman. *History of the German Element in Virginia*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1977 [1900].
Scott, Eugene L. "Thurmond on the New River." *West Virginia Review* 23 (March 1946): 20-22.
Scott, Shaunna L. *Two Sides to Everything: The Cultural Construction of Class Consciousness in Harlan County, Kentucky.* New York: SUNY Press, 1995.
Selevan, Ida Cohen. "Jewish Wage Earners in Pittsburgh, 1890-1930." *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 65 (March, 1976): 272-273.
Semrau, Ronda G. "Roxie Gore: Looking Back in Logan County." *Goldenseal* 16 (Summer 1990): 23-28.
Shackelford, Laurel, and Bill Weinberg, eds. *Our Appalachia*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
Shapiro, Edward S. *A Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II*. Volume 5 of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. Henry L. Feingold. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
Sheskin, Ira M. "The Dixie Diaspora: The 'Loss' of the Small Southern Jewish Community." *Southeastern Geographer* 40, no. 1 (May 2000): 52-74.
Shifflett, Crandall. *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.
Shinedling, Abraham I. *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850-1958*. Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, Inc., 1963.
Shinedling, Abraham I., and Manuel Pickus. *History of the Beckley Jewish Community*. Beckley, W. Va.: Biggs-Johnston-Withrow, 1955.
Shosteck, Robert. *Small-Town Jewry Tell Their Story: Survey of B'nai B'rith Membership in Small Communities in the United States and Canada*. Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Vocational Service, 1961 [1953].

Simon, John. "The South African Jewish Experience." In *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, 67-90. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *In My Father's Court*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1962.
Sklare, Marshall. *America's Jews*. New York: Random House, 1971.
Smith, Judith E. *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1985.
Smith, Nancy Sue. *An Early History of Mingo County, West Virginia*. Williamson, W. Va.: Self-published, 1960.
Solins, Mrs. Samuel, and Mrs. Paul W. Jones. *McDowell County History*. Fort Worth, Tex.: University Supply, 1959.
Sorin, Gerald. *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920*. Volume 3 of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. Henry L. Feingold. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
Soyer, Daniel. "Between Two Worlds: The Jewish *Landsmanshaftn* and Immigrant Identity." *American Jewish History* 76 (September 1986): 5-24.
Sparkmon, William R. *The Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in West Virginia*. Charleston, W.Va.: Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society, 1983.
Sprecher, Hannah. "Let Them Drink and Forget Poverty: Orthodox Rabbis' Reactions to Prohibition." *American Jewish Archives* 43 (1991): 135-179.
Stanislawski, Michael. *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983.
Stern, Norton B. "The Jewish Community of a Nevada Mining Town." *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 15 (October 1982): 48-78.
_____. "The Major Role of Polish Jews in the Pioneer West." *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* (July 1976): 326-344.
"Store Checks vs. Thrift." *Coal Age* 8 (October 1915): 619.
Suberman, Stella. *The Jew Store*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998.
Sullivan, Ken. *Thurmond: A New River Community*. NP: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1989.
"Sure We Got Problems." *Goldenseal* 20 (Summer 1994): 65.
Szajkowski, Zosa. "The Attitude of American Jews to East European Jewish Immigration, 1881-1893." *Papers of the American Jewish Historical Society* (March 1951): 222-232.
_____. "Sufferings of Jewish Emigrants to America in Transit Through Germany." *Jewish Social Studies* (Winter-Spring 1977): 105-116.
Tenenbaum, Shelly. "Immigrants and Capital: Jewish Loan Societies in the United States, 1880-1945." *American Jewish History* 76 (September 1986): 67-77.
Toll, William. "The 'New Social History' and Recent Jewish Historical Writing." *American Jewish History*, 325-341.
_____. "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920." *American Jewish Archives* (1989): 7-26.
Trotter, Joe William, Jr. *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
The Virginias 4 (January 1883): 3.
Waldron, Peter. *The End of Imperial Russia, 1855-1917*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
Waller, Altina. *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
Webb, Clive. "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow." *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999): 55-80.
Weinryb, Bernard. *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973.
"Weinstein Brothers." In *Picturesque Middlesboro, The Magic City*. Middlesboro: *Pinnacle News*, n.d.

Weissbach, Lee Shai. "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South." *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231-262.
_____. "Small Town Jewish Life and the Pennsylvania Pattern." *Western Pennsylvania History* 83 (Spring 2000): 37-53.
_____. "Stability and Mobility in the Small Jewish Community: Examples from Kentucky History." American Jewish History 79 (Spring 1990): 355-375.
"Welch—The City of Friendship." *West Virginia Review* (June 1924): 16-21.
Wenger, Beth S. "Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers." *American Jewish History* 79 (1989-1990): 16-36.
West Virginians of 1934-1935. Wheeling: *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 1935.
When the Trains Came to Norton, Wise County. Norton, Va.: *Coalfield Progress*, 1941.
Whitfield, Stephen J. "Commercial Passions: The Southern Jew as Businessman." *American Jewish History* 71 (1981-1982): 342-357.
_____. "Jews and Other Southerners: Counterpoint and Paradox." In *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry*, ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, 76-104. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979.
Williams, John Alexander. "Class, Section, and Culture in Nineteenth Century West Virginia Politics." In *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina Waller, 210-232. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
"Williamson—In the Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field." *West Virginia Review* (October 1924): 20-22.
Williamson, West Virginia: Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field. Williamson, W. Va.: Williamson Chamber of Commerce, 1931.
Wischnitzer, Mark. *To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration since 1800*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America.
Wolfe, Margaret Ripley. "Aliens in Southern Appalachia: Catholics in the Coal Camps, 1900-1940." *Appalachian Heritage* 6 (1978): 43-56.
Wolitz, Seth. "Bifocality in Jewish Identity in the Texas-Jewish Experience." In *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, 185-208. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
Woods, Jim. *Raleigh County, West Virginia*. Beckley, W.Va.: Raleigh County Historical Society, 1994.
Wyman, Mark. *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
Zborowski, Marc, and Elisabeth Herzog. *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe*. New York: International Universities Press, 1952.
Zenner, Walter P. *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1991.
Zipperstein, Steven J. *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.

Theses, Dissertations, Unpublished Papers and Manuscripts

David, Jerome Paul. "Jewish Consciousness in the Small Town: A Sociological Study of Jewish Identification." M.A. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1974.
Davis, Jack E. "Jews, White Gentiles, and Caste Society in Natchez." Paper delivered at the "Jewish Experience in the Southern Americas" Conference. Tulane University, New Orleans, April 8, 2000.
Eiland, Edward. "Fact Sheet, B'nai El Congregation." Unpublished document in author's possession.
Fear, Frank Anthony. "The Quest for Saliency: Patterns of Jewish Communal Organization in Three Appalachian Small Towns." M.A. thesis, West Virginia University, 1972.

Gillenwater, Mack. "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field of Southern West Virginia, 1880-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1972.
Kugelmass, Jack. "Native Aliens: The Jews of Poland as a Middleman Minority." Ph.D. diss., New School for Social Research, 1980.
Laing, James T. "The Negro Miner in West Virginia." Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1933.
Lawrence, Randall G. "Appalachian Metamorphosis: Industrializing Society on the Central Appalachian Plateau, 1860-1913." Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983.
Massay, Glenn. "Coal Consolidation: Profile of the Fairmont Field of Northern West Virginia, 1852-1903." Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1970.
Orum, Thomas T. "Jews and Communal Violence in the Amazon, 1835 to 1928." Paper delivered at the "Jewish Experience in the Southern Americas" Conference. Tulane University, New Orleans, April 8, 2000.
Rogoff, Leonard. "Small Town Orthodoxy, Southern Style." Paper presented at the Southern Jewish Historical Society Annual Meeting. New Orleans, 1995.
Serel, Matthew S. "A Brief History of Keystone, West Virginia." Unpublished paper, 1988. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va.
Simon, Richard M. "The Development of Underdevelopment: The Coal Industry and its Effect on the West Virginia Economy, 1880-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1978.
Sniderman, Marilou S. "Diamond in the Rough: A Biography of Harry Schwachter on the Occasion of his Diamond Jubilee." Unpublished manuscript, 1963. Williamson Public Library, Williamson, W. Va.
Sullivan, Charles Kenneth. "Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923." Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979.
Thomas, Jerry Bruce. "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910." Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1971.

Other

Annual Reports of the Lomza Provincial Governor, 1907-1912. File no. 6513, Chancellory of the Warsaw Governor-General Collection (Kancelaria General-Gubernatora Warszawskiego). Main Archive of Old Documents(Archiwum Glowne Akt Dawnych), Warsaw, Poland. Translated by Robert Blobaum.
Founders' Plaque. Temple Emanuel. Welch, W. Va. McDowell County Public Library, Welch, W. Va.
Gravestones. "Hebrew Mountain" cemetery, Pocahontas, Va.
Gravestones. Middlesboro Jewish Cemetery, Middlesboro, Ky.
Keystone City Hall plaque, Keystone, W. Va.
Norfolk & Western Railway Company Sixth Annual Report. Philadelphia: N&W, 1902.
Righteous Remnant: Jewish Survival in Appalachia. Video-documentary produced by Maryanne Reed. West Virginia Public Television, 1997.